UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Faith in the Process:

The Hermeneutics of Intersubjectivity in Three Women's Autobiographies of Trauma and Healing

BY

Angela Roorda Winter ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled *Faith in the Process: The Hermeneutics of Intersubjectivity in Three Women's Autobiographies of Trauma and Healing* submitted by Angela Roorda Winter in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of PhD

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for Jonas,

my son

Abstract

This thesis examines intersubjective and therapeutic processes of narrative self-construction as they emerge in three recent women's autobiographies of trauma and healing. Autobiographical narration, the thesis suggests, is an illocutionary act addressed to a reader with whom the narrator seeks connection and from whom the narrator seeks ethical commitment as the recipient of testimony. This dynamics of writing and reader response is especially evident in autobiographies of trauma and healing, such as Marie Cardinal's memoir of madness and psychoanalytic cure, *The Words to Say It* (1983), Donna Williams' two-volume account of a life with and beyond autism, *Nobody Nowhere* (1992) and *Somebody Somewhere* (1994), and Elly Danica's narrative of incest and recovery, *Don't: A Woman's Word* (1988).

In this study, multi-disciplinary theoretical chapters alternate with readings of the primary texts. Chapters providing a survey of reader-oriented poetics in current autobiography theory, an exploration of the notion of self as narrative as has emerged recently in the fields of psychology and hermeneutic philosophy, and an analysis of the healing process for survivors of trauma as it takes place in the context of psychotherapeutic practice, together form a basis for understanding key elements of the autobiographical texts: the cathartic and constructive function of words in Cardinal's text, the process of narrative self-revision that emerges in Williams' serial autobiography, and the complex dynamics of reader response triggered by Danica's book.

This is followed by an examination of philosopher Paul Ricoeur's model of *ipse* identity, which conjoins the elements of narrative and reader response to establish an intersubjective model of ethical selfhood that is able to encompass the complexities of address emerging in these autobiographies. The thesis concludes by suggesting these narratives of trauma and healing be considered as contemporary iterations of spiritual autobiography.

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Introduction

Autobiographies of Trauma and Healing

> *"What good are all these words if you can't hear me? Or these pages you may never read? My life is created as I narrate, and my memory grows stronger with writing; what I do not put in words on a page will be erased by time." Isabel Allende,* Paula.

Isabel Allende writes these words to her daughter, who lies mute and motionless in a coma, barely clinging to life on a hospital bed. Powerless to stop the slow drift towards death, gripped by fear and impending grief, Allende fills the hours by the bedside with words: a letter to Paula. She tells stories of her life, of Paula's life, of their life together. The letter becomes a book, an autobiographical narrative which begins in the hospital, circles back into memory and then returns again to the bedside, and a final farewell. Paula never does survive to read the letter addressed to her, yet in her silent presence--both in the hospital and in the book--she becomes a guide for Allende as she reviews her own life, and a comfort for her as she comes to terms with her loss. When the time of death arrives, Allende is ready, and is able to let go of her daughter, both in her life and as an addressee of her text: the words and memories become her own.

Autobiographical writing is an intersubjective process, involving readers as much as writers. If there is no one present to listen to the story, or hold the text in hand, then a reader must be created, implied, believed in for the words to be told, and for the life to emerge. In many autobiographies this presence of the reader is not so obvious, either eclipsed by the subjectivity of the writer, or perhaps submerged by the autobiographer's desire to stand alone. But it is there. And in autobiographies like Isabel Allende's, which are triggered by crisis and trauma, the reader becomes especially prominent, functioning as a witness to pain and a lifeline into healing and restoration.

In this study I will be looking at three such autobiographies of trauma and healing: Marie Cardinal's *The Words to Say It,* a narrative of madness and psychoanalytic cure, Donna Williams' *Nobody Nowhere* and *Somebody Somewhere,* a two-volume account of a life with and beyond autism, and Elly Danica's *Don't: A Woman's Word,* a memoir of incest and recovery. Like Isabel Allende's *Paula,* these autobiographies arise from and narrate circumstances of trauma and traumatic remembering. But also, like Allende's text, they describe experiences of emergence and healing. And just as Allende adopts her own daughter as a therapeutic narratee for her text, so these autobiographers inscribe and mobilize readers as participants in the healing process.

Psychological trauma is a complex phenomenon, emerging from a wide variety of circumstances and varying in its degree of impact upon the individuals involved. It can result from a single overwhelming event which explodes like a bomb in a person's life, defying existing coping strategies and splintering the psyche; or, trauma can be the aftermath of a prolonged period of crisis which weakens and eventually exhausts a person's psychological and emotional resources. The *Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry* describes psychological trauma as an experience of "intense fear, helplessness, loss of control, and threat of annihilation" (Andreasen, quoted in Herman 33), and as Judith Herman comments, "traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning" (33). Trauma overwhelms and disconnects, but it also silences. "When people are traumatized," notes Bessel van der Kolk, "they are said to experience 'speechless terror': the emotional impact of the event may interfere with the capacity to capture the experience in words or symbols" (258). According to Pierre Janet, an early researcher into psychological trauma, traumatic memories are not stored like other memories but become dissociated from everyday experience. Unlike ordinary memories, which are stored in narrative form, and which can be shared among others and integrated with other experiences, "traumatic memories" are stored somatically, and remain silent. As B. A. van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart summarize, referring to a case study made in one of Janet's papers,

> ...in contrast to narrative memory, which is a social act, traumatic memory is inflexible and invariable. Traumatic memory has no social component; it is not addressed to anybody, the patient does not respond to anybody: it is a solitary activity.' In contrast, ordinary memory fundamentally serves a social

> function, illustrated by Irene's telling people about the death of her mother as an appeal for help and reconnection." (431)

Healing from trauma, then, involves a process of giving voice to mute traumatic memories–transforming them into narrative memories which enable psychic integration and social reconnection.

The autobiographies I will be looking at in this study both describe and enact within the text this process of memory transformation. In referring to them as "autobiographies of trauma and healing" I've sought to imply and emphasize the important role of narrative in this process. By choosing the word "healing," which suggests something that is ongoing and unfinished, rather than, for instance, "recovery," which hints at conclusion, I mean to suggest the never-fully-completed nature of self-narration: the strategies used to recover from trauma, in these texts, become also the basis for further narrative self-construction and self-revision, processes which, I argue, reflect more generally the intersubjective means by which subjectivity and selfhood are negotiated in everyday life.[1]

In *The Words to Say It* (1983, first published in France in 1975 as *Les Mots pour le dire*) novelist Marie Cardinal autobiographically recounts her seven-year experience of psychoanalysis. Debilitated by hallucinations and an unexplained and unstoppable uterine hemorrhage, Cardinal gradually finds relief from these symptoms by discovering and analyzing their psychological roots in emotional traumas she experienced as a child: her mother's revelation of a failed abortion, and a scene of humiliation in front of her father's camera. In narrating these silenced memories, both in the analyst's office and within the autobiographical text, Cardinal is not only freed of her symptoms, but also comes to experience a metaphorical rebirth of self.

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[1] In arguing that the therapeutic narrative practices of these autobiographies reflect and serve as an apt model for everyday negotiations of subjectivity, I do not wish to pathologize non-traumatic experiences of subjectivity or suggest that we are all "in recovery," a move Wendy Kaminer decries in her book, *I'm Dysfunctional, You're Dysfunctional.* To the contrary, I wish to suggest that such autobiographers adopt very healthy, or "normal," mechanisms for the purposes of recovery and self-construction, but that because of the extreme circumstances of their writing, their texts tend to highlight with unusual clarity what typically takes place on a much more subtle level for most people.

Donna Williams' two-volume autobiography, *Nobody Nowhere: The Extraordinary Autobiography of an Autistic* (1992) and *Somebody Somewhere: Breaking Free from the World of Autism* (1994), also deals with trauma, but of a very different sort. For Williams, a pervasive dysfunction in her ability to use language and touch to communicate with others renders everyday social situations traumatic: other peoples' spoken words fail to make sense to her and even a brief handshake becomes an overwhelming intrusion. In order to cope, she psychically splits off into multiple personalities, enabling Donna--her "real self"--to retreat into a safe, but profoundly isolated, private world. In her first book, Williams describes this experience of invisible imprisonment, but also begins to emerge from it. Through a self-diagnosis of autism, a point reached during the course of narrative life-writing, Williams finds a key to self-interpretation and with it the tools--and courage--needed for psychic integration and tentative negotiation of the world of others. In the second book Williams continues her narrative by describing her ongoing, and now more successful, struggle towards self-emergence and social connection, particularly as it takes place in wake of the publication of her first book. Having been positioned, both by herself and her reading public, as a key spokesperson for autism, Williams begins in *Somebody Somewhere* to reconsider and revise her relationship to this diagnosis, striving to move beyond its stigma by celebrating her differences, and questioning preconceived notions of "normality."

Elly Danica's book, *Don't: A Woman's Word* (1988), deals with a third type of trauma: sexual abuse. In this autobiography, Danica recounts her process of remembering, for the first time at age forty, traumatic scenes of abuse from her childhood: multiple rapes by her father, and prostitution by him to men in the small community where she grew up. Switching between time frames, by turns the abused child and the remembering woman, Danica also describes the years of alienation, depression and self-abuse in between. In remembering and autobiographically breaking her silence, Danica finds healing in a restored sense of self, and is able to move beyond her past and, for the first time, begin dreaming for the future.

Of the many titles available (for bookstores are currently teeming with autobiographies dealing with experiences of trauma) I've selected these three to focus on in this study.[2] Though I have grouped them under the rubric,

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[2] Other autobiographies of trauma and healing which could also have fit into the context of this study include Helen Keller's *The Story of My Life*, Kristjana Gunnars' *Zero Hour*, Etty Hillesum's *An Interrupted Life: The Diaries of Etty Hillesum*, Signe Hammer's *By Her Own Hand: Memoirs of a Suicide's Daughter*, Eva Brewster's *Vanished in Darkness: An Auschwitz Memoir*, Sylvia Fraser's

"autobiographies of trauma and healing," these texts exhibit as much diversity between them as they do similarity among them. They are divided along geographic lines. Cardinal's book, for instance, was originally published in France in 1975, and only reached English-speaking audiences in translation eight years later. As well as being set in France, it depicts scenes from the war-torn Algeria of Cardinal's childhood. Williams, on the other hand, is a native of Australia and a current resident in Great Britain. Danica is a Canadian, born in the Netherlands. As well as these differences, there are differences in the ways these texts have been contextualized by their critical readers. Marie Cardinal's book is often read alongside her other overtly fictional writings, or else included in critical discussions of mother-daughter relations, psychoanalysis, or, with its Algerian references, in analyses of colonization and gender.[3] Donna Williams' books have thus far received little critical attention, but reviews and promotional writing usually frame them as narrative case studies which provide a personal window into the world of autism.[4] And finally, Elly Danica's book has typically been read as a feminist

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My Father's House: A Memoir of Incest and of Healing, Joy Kogawa's *Obasan,* and Liza Potvin's *White Lies: For My Mother.* A comparative study of men's autobiographies of trauma and healing might include William Styron's *Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness,* Nicholas Wolterstorff's *Lament for a Son,* Oliver Sack's *A Leg to Stand On,* Philip Roth's *Patrimony,* Jacobo Timerman's *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number,* and John Updike's *Self-Consciousness.*

[3] See, for example, essays by Bettleheim, Neuman, Yalom, Le Clezio, Elliot, Powrie, Cairns and Lionnet.

[4] Sidonie Smith is an exception here. See her critical essays "Re-Citing, Re-Siting, and Re-Sighting Likeness: Reading the Family Archive in Drucilla Modjeska's *Poppy,* Donna Williams' *Nobody Nowhere,* and Sally Morgan's *My Place*" and "Taking It to a Limit One More Time: Autobiography and Autism."

document, a text which breaks the silence surrounding sexual abuse and has functioned as a catalyst for social change, particularly in Canada.[5]

Despite this multitude of differences, I have nevertheless chosen to link these three texts together, and place them alongside each other for study. Aside from the fact that they are all autobiographical, written by women within the last two decades, and concerned with issues of trauma and healing--in themselves good reasons for comparison--my selection has to a large degree been guided by my own personal responses. From among the other autobiographies I have read, I have found these three texts to be especially compelling. As a reader, I have felt myself interpellated by them--emotionally drawn into them and hailed into response--more dramatically and profoundly than I have been by the others. Rather than ignore these reading responses, I have chosen to pay attention to them, to trust them, and to draw upon them in my understanding of the complex reading dynamics fostered in and by these autobiographies. I do not make claims to objectivity. Approaching these texts, and this study, with some of my own experiences of trauma and healing, a process which for me has also involved autobiographical writing, I have at times identified with their protagonists, and felt their experiences resonating with my own.[6] Much of my study here has been fueled by a desire to untangle, in order to understand, this complex interaction between autobiographical, therapeutic, and academic reading/writing.

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[5] See, for example, essays by Williamson and Warley.

[6] My experience is not one of madness, autism or sexual abuse, but of what is sometimes called "suicide survival." On a March afternoon in 1991, after a prolonged period of depression followed by a brief slide into psychosis, my husband physically assaulted our infant son Jonas, and ended his own life. I found them. Jonas survived, but suffered extensive brain damage as a result of his injuries. During the initial days in the intensive care unit with Jonas, and in the months and years that

Because of the broad social and theoretical relevance of these texts, I have elected in this study to address them from a correspondingly diverse set of interpretive contexts. Rather than adopting a single theory or methodology and rigidly adhering to it in exhaustive explication, I instead take the more exploratory step of drawing upon several different bodies of theory, reading the autobiographical texts alongside them in hopes of initiating an intertextual conversation. The structuring of the chapters reflects this choice: the theoretical chapters alternate with readings of the primary texts. Though each reading especially highlights elements brought out in the preceding theoretical chapter, all of the chapters hermeneutically inform each other--explicitly in some cases, but also implicitly.

Probably the most obvious literary context for analysis of these texts is the field of autobiography studies. Given the importance of the reader in these texts of trauma and healing, I provide in Chapter 1 some background on the theoretical status of the reader in poetics of the genre. Indeed, the reader has, in recent years, come to figure more prominently and with this has come a recognition of the

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followed, my struggle, amid all the emotional upheaval, was to find a language which would adequately explain--to others, to myself, and also to Jonas himself should he eventually reach a point where he is able to ask and understand--why and how such a thing could happen. What kind of narrative would be both true to the facts, but also true to our various and changing emotional needs: medical, psychiatric, philosophical, religious, literary? I still struggle with these questions, and continue to work them out, both at a personal level and here, in my academic work.

inherent performativity of the autobiographical act. Autobiography is not simply a process of self-reflective expression, but is a communicative act which invokes and depends upon the presence of a reader; autobiography, therefore, is intersubjective. And as feminist scholars have shown, this intersubjective dimension emerges especially in women's autobiographies: aware of and responsive to the reading other, autobiographies by women are typically dialogical in character.

These feminist studies, together with the reader-oriented poetics, call into question the humanist subject traditionally assumed in autobiography studies. In this regard, recent poststructuralist theorists of the genre have shown a similar impulse; however, in their radical deconstruction and dismantling of this individualist, unitary autobiographical subject, these critics go to the opposite extreme, dismissing any notion of autobiographical "selfhood" as illusory, and rejecting any potential for writing to be emancipatory or communicative. Though the "anti-autobiographies" of poststructuralism succeed in poignantly and precisely mapping the experience of subjective fragmentation and dislocation, it is the feminist and reader-oriented poetics of the genre which provide a firmer base for explaining the emancipatory and restorative dimensions of these autobiographies of trauma and healing.[7]

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[7] A good example of a poststructuralist "anti-autobiography" (a term coined by Germaine Bree) is Roland Barthes' *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, which I discuss in some detail in Chapter 1.

Words are able to connect, as the feminist and reader-oriented theorists suggest, and this optimism in the power of language to bridge the "enunciatory abyss" is nowhere more powerfully demonstrated than in Marie Cardinal's *The Words to Say It*. In Chapter 2 I provide a reading of this autobiography, in which Cardinal narrates the story of her experience of madness and her subsequent journey through psychoanalysis and into healing. Cardinal's relationship with language is at the heart of this text. Psychically maimed by her mother's hostile words, Cardinal feels imprisoned by language, and isolated from others. Encouraged initially by the listening presence of her analyst and her husband, and buoyed later on by their textual counterpart, the implied reader, Cardinal comes to discover the capacity of words to communicate and connect. In thus discovering the power of language--language that is, as she puts it, "alive"--she is able to salve the filial wounds of her childhood and experience a metaphorical rebirth of self.

As becomes clear in Cardinal's book, narration--finding "the words to say it"--is tightly intertwined with identity itself. This question of the relationship between narrative and subjectivity has recently become an important one for psychologists and philosophers. In Chapter 3 I provide an overview of what has been called "the narrative turn" in the human sciences. In academic psychology, disillusionment with positivistic modes of inquiry into human behaviour has engendered a new approach which borrows literary tropes from the humanities and reinterprets human action as fundamentally narrative in structure. Abandoning mechanistic metaphors, these narrative psychologists investigate instead the stories implicit to and embedded in self-perception and social interaction, asserting that rather than functioning as discrete individual units–Newtonian billiard balls in collision with one another–human beings think and act within a highly intersubjective linguistic universe of shared stories.

Parallel to this shift towards narrative in the social sciences is the recent interest in narrative and subjectivity in the humanities, particularly among hermeneutic philosophers. Unlike their counterparts in psychology, however, these thinkers adopt narrative not in reaction to the strictures of positivism and Enlightenment thinking, but, on the contrary, as a response to the agentive void left in the wake of poststructuralism's dismantlement of the human subject. For these philosophers, the most prominent of whom is Paul Ricoeur, narrative does not simply provide an explanatory metaphor for human behaviour, but constitutes the very fabric of identity itself. With its emphasis upon temporality and its implicit evocation of questions of ethics, the theory of narrative identity is able, more adequately than poststructuralist theories, to explain how human subjectivity is both mediated by language, and at the same time also enabled and made responsible by it.

These theorists of narrative identity emphasize the ongoing character of narrative self-construction. Subjectivity emerges as a process of narration and renarration; the self is continually under revision. This process, this hermeneutics of narrative self-interpretation, is strikingly exemplified in Donna Williams' two-volume autobiography, *Nobody Nowhere* and *Somebody Somewhere*. In Chapter 4 I examine this autobiography, in which Williams provides an account of her evolving experience of, and relationship to, the term autism. In the first book, Williams describes the profound estrangement of her own private world of perception from the world of others--what she refers to as "the world." *Nobody Nowhere* marks a dual breakthrough for her: through the very writing of it, in implying and hailing an empathetic reader, she is able to make a tentative first step towards bridging the disjunction between worlds. As well, the writing of this text coincides with her discovery of the term "autism," which functions for her as a revelation and as a crucial key to self-understanding. In the second book, Williams continues her narrative, describing the experience of instant celebrity surrounding publication of *Nobody Nowhere*, but also circling back in order to revisit and hermeneutically reinterpret scenes from the first book. In the process, she comes to reassess her identity as an autistic: whereas in *Nobody Nowhere* Williams unreservedly embraces the diagnosis of autism, in *Somebody Somewhere* she expresses a desire to move beyond the constraints of psychiatric labels and enlarge her identity beyond its scope.[8]

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[8] Williams has recently published a third autobiography, *Like Color to the Blind: Soul Searching & Soul Finding* (1996). Here she continues the narrative hermeneutics of her first two books: reflecting on her journey from obscurity (a "nobody nowhere") into celebrity (becoming a "somebody somewhere"), and describing her ongoing struggle towards normalcy (becoming an "anybody anywhere").

A discussion of these autobiographies of trauma and healing would not be complete without some attention to the dynamics of healing as it takes place in psychotherapeutic practice. If the role of the reader in autobiographical writing is still sometimes a question for debate, the importance of the therapeutic other in clinical settings is uncontested. In Chapter 5 I discuss the stages of healing for survivors of abuse and other traumas, and then go on to describe the psychotherapeutic dynamics fostered by feminist therapists in their work with abused women. Such therapy proceeds on a highly dialogical basis, with the therapist functioning as a witness and guide in the client's process of remembrance and recovery. As well, it draws upon creative resources, in that the client learns to narrate and renarrate her life in new and more empowering ways. Narrative-oriented psychoanalysts stress and cogently theorize the therapeutic importance of such narration, emphasizing as well its imaginative and self-inventive dimensions. In privileging such "narrative truth" over "historical truth," however, these theories run the risk of falling silent in the face of issues of abuse and social injustice. Feminist therapists, on the other hand, provide a better balance, and more aptly reflect the type of therapeutics at work in autobiographies of trauma and healing. While facilitating client empowerment through the creative use of narrative, these therapists also invite, rather than dismiss, examination of historical contexts. As in the autobiographies I'm looking at, the process of recovery for female survivors of trauma also typically carries with it a political dimension: personal therapeutic narratives also function as social critique.

Elly Danica's book provides a particularly powerful example of this. A disturbing story of incest and sexual abuse, *Don't: A Woman's Word* functions simultaneously as a personal therapeutic text and as a public manifesto, calling for an end to the abuse of women and children. In Chapter 6 I reinvoke some of the intensity of Danica's text and, in a personal response, enact the reading dynamics which enable Danica to achieve both her therapeutic and political ends. In *Don't*, Danica narrates her descent into the hell of her memories--brutal scenes of abuse--but also describes her ascent out of that pit of memory into a life of wholeness and hope. She describes her own experience of trauma and healing, but also draws the reader into an analogous experience at the very level of reading. By means of its aggressive narrative strategies, *Don't* traumatizes its readers and induces a symptomatic identification with the suffering subject; through its invocation of therapeutic and empathetic others, however, it also provides an avenue of re-emergence. In thus drawing the reader into the very dynamics of abuse and recovery, Danica facilitates her own healing, and also provides a text which is able to function therapeutically for its readers. And in bringing the issue of abuse to the reader in such an experiential and visceral manner, she also ensures that attention is paid to the social and ethical questions at stake.

This question of ethical response and the belief that hope for change and healing is warranted even in the most cruel and traumatic of circumstances is central not only to Danica's text but also to Williams' and Cardinal's. What is it that enables these women to survive and move beyond their respective traumas? How are we to conceptualize the holistic self they each claim to discover or piece together from the fragments of their various histories? In Chapter 7 I revisit the debate between traditional and poststructuralist approaches to the question of subjectivity, and suggest that neither of these is able adequately to theorize the sense of agency and emancipation evident in these autobiographies. I return at this point to Ricoeur's philosophy of narrative identity, in particular his more recent theorizations of *ipse*-identity, as a potentially fruitful alternative.

Ricoeur's theory of *ipse*-identity is better able to address these complex questions of agency and survival. *Ipse*-identity stands in dialectic relationship to another pole of identity: *idem*-identity.[9] If *idem*-identity (the only pole of identity, Ricoeur argues, recognized by the Enlightenment and poststructuralist theorists) establishes constancy over time through self-sameness, *ipse*-identity does so in a very different way: through the act of enunciation. Through the illocutionary act of making a promise--of affirming oneself through commitment--the *ipse* is able to persist and maintain identity even in the face of fragmentation and collapse of

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[9] Ricoeur borrows these terms from Latin. *Ipse* translates as "self", or more specifically "oneself." *Idem* means "same." Ricoeur's argument is that the two have been unduly conflated: that in the history of philosophy, "selfhood" has come to mean "self-sameness," a definition which ignores other important, albeit more intangible, dimensions of subjectivity.

idem-identity. It is this *ipse,* I argue, which reveals its intrinsic intersubjectivity in the act of attestation, that emerges and speaks so starkly in these autobiographies of trauma and healing.

Throughout the process of thinking and writing about these texts, my approach has been interdisciplinary: I have drawn upon work done in the areas of literary criticism and theory, feminist studies, psychology, philosophy and psychotherapy. This has seemed appropriate. These autobiographical texts position themselves at interesting intersection points between disciplines, and thwart any easy classification or interpretation. Sometimes overtly blurring the distinctions between fiction and traditional autobiography, they raise complex issues of generic categorization.[10] In depicting experiences of psychological trauma and healing, they resemble first-person case studies, and thus are able to provide insight into, or function bibliotherapeutically in, analogous situations. In dealing with women's experiences, and raising issues of gender and power, they are amenable to feminist analysis. And in their portrayal of what might be called "limit cases" of subjectivity--situations of extreme destitution of self--they raise compelling philosophical questions about the very nature of subjectivity itself. These autobiographies of trauma and healing are broad in their intellectual and emotional appeal, and have garnered diverse audiences: academic and clinical, as well as popular. I have sought to represent this diversity in my study.

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[10] In at least two cases, the generic distinctions between autobiography (as factual history) and fiction are intentionally problematized. The Gynergy edition of Danica's *Don't,* for example, calls the book, "autofiction," and Cardinal's *The Words to Say It* is subtitled "an autobiographical novel." Despite these generic nuances (which I discuss in more detail further into the study) I have chosen, for the sake of clarity, to continue using the term "autobiography" when referring to the primary texts I'm examining.

Of course, opting for the breadth of interdisciplinary work also brings with it a necessary sacrifice of precision and closure. In many ways this study is more suggestive than definitive. In raising more questions than it answers, it tentatively points to new paths of research, rather than definitively closing doors with a final interpretation. In the process of finding various contexts within which to read and understand these texts, I've also discovered that these autobiographies talk back. Rather than a unidirectional flow of ideas, in which the theoretical texts straightforwardly explicate the autobiographical texts, an intertextual dialogue has emerged in which these primary texts also respond by interrogating the interpretive frameworks, revealing blind spots in the theories and suggesting areas in need of further refinement. For example, while the hermeneutic theories of narrative identity go a long way in describing the process of self-configuration taking place in these autobiographies, the absence of any mention of gender and its role in subjectivity and self-constitution renders these theories unable adequately to address the very real and important sociopolitical dimensions of these texts. And by the same token, while the feminist theories of autobiography and women's life writing do an excellent job of examining the politics of gendered subjectivity, they do not have as much to say when it comes to articulating the more intangible spiritual dimension which also very powerfully emerges in these texts. As well, while the narrative approaches to psychotherapy admirably theorize the therapeutic potency of creative and self-inventive autobiographical writing, these particular texts of trauma and healing, in turn, pointedly reveal some of the ethical problems at stake in their sometimes concomitant soft-pedaling on the question of "historical truth." There are several such dialogues taking place in these pages. In analogy to the model of hermeneutic intersubjectivity I set up in Chapter 7, this project itself is probably best approached as an experiment in hermeneutic intertextuality, in which theory and literary text enter into conversation, mutually informing and interpreting each other, opening up new avenues for further dialogue along the way.

But some sense of closure is, nonetheless, required. In my concluding chapter, I gather up some of the conversational strands and, perhaps in defiance of these texts' resistance to generic classification, nevertheless go ahead and tentatively suggest a literary tradition in which to position and interpret them. These contemporary narratives of trauma and healing exhibit a striking resemblance, in both form and function, to the traditional spiritual autobiography. The very phrase I've adopted to describe these autobiographies, "trauma and healing," implies a conversion narrative not unlike the "death and rebirth" transformation which forms the core of the traditional counterparts. As well, just as early spiritual autobiographers used the autobiographical act as a means of solidifying the religious community--with private confession doubling as public testimonial–so these contemporary women's autobiographies function both personally and communally; enabling individual healing while at the same time providing inspiration for others similarly situated, they thereby act as catalysts for both therapeutic and social change. And finally, while rejecting–in some cases quite vehemently–the patriarchal God of traditional Christianity, these women's autobiographies of trauma and healing nevertheless also suggest inklings of an comparable ideal reader. This transcendent addressee is not a male figure, but a distinctly female one who is maternal in character and nurturing in response. These autobiographies, hence, model the narrative hermeneutics of the traditional Christian spiritual autobiography, but shift the focus to a more maternal paradigm, one mapped out by feminist theologians and writers on feminine spirituality.

What emerges quite strongly in these autobiographies, in conjunction with the sociopolitical praxis of consciousness raising and community building, is a spiritual quest guided by a sense of, and belief in, the other: the reading other inscribed in and hailed by the text, and the ideal M/other imagined between its lines. In writing their autobiographies, in persevering with, as Elly Danica puts it, a "faith in the process" (14), these women not only find personal healing and a renewed sense of selfhood, but also illustrate, in a striking way, some of the dynamics of subjectivity itself.

Autobiography and the Reader

It is not surprising in a genre which takes as its paradigmatic moment that of a person sitting down to write his or her life, that theoretical speculation in the field of autobiography has focused primarily on the selfhood and subjectivity of the autobiographer and the relationship between that writer and his or her text. Theories of autobiography, ranging from the traditional humanist poetics of the genre, to the more recent poststructuralist deconstructions of that unified autobiographical self, have tended to be preoccupied with the self-text dyad. In recent years, however, a third term has been added to the autobiographical equation: the reader. It is becoming increasingly clear that autobiography cannot adequately be understood without acknowledgment of its various readers and their part in the construction and maintenance of the autobiographer's text and subjectivity. Subjectivity is an intersubjective phenomenon, emerging in negotiation with others. As well, it is linguistic, couched in language, and hence enmeshed in an intertextual landscape. From its simplest expression in the utterance of "I," to its more elaborate articulations in autobiographical story-telling, subjectivity is persistently dialogical in character.

In *Problems in General Linguistics,* Emile Benveniste explores the dialogical bases of subjectivity as they emerge in the pragmatics of personal pronouns.

Such pronouns, he argues, are fundamentally context-dependent, deriving their meaning from the discursive situation within which they are uttered. "What then is the reality to which *I* or *you* refers?" he asks. "It is solely a 'reality of discourse,' and this is a very strange thing. *I* cannot be defined except in terms of 'locution,' not in terms of objects as a nominal sign is" (218). To say "I," therefore, is to take part in--to create--a discursive situation, one which presupposes an audience, an addressee. The "I," argues Benveniste, always implies a "you," and cannot exist independent of that receptive other: "Consciousness of self is only possible if it is experienced by contrast. I use *I* only when I am speaking to someone who will be a *you* in my address" (224).

Autobiography theorist Elizabeth Bruss, in her project of generic definition, takes this Benvenistian axiom a step further. In her book, *Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre*, she suggests that autobiographies too be viewed as illocutionary acts--verbal expressions which are pragmatic at the same time as they are referential, which *do* something in the very act of *referring to.* Characterizing autobiography as an extended enunciation of the Benvenistian "I," a speech-act which, as we've seen, assumes and depends upon the presence--real or imaginary--of a reader, Bruss goes on to develop a definition of autobiography which is based not on form (as traditional poetics of the genre have tended be) but on function. Examining some of the classics of the autobiography canon, she concludes that

> there is no intrinsically autobiographical form. But there are limited generalizations to be made about the dimensions of action which are common to these autobiographies, and which seem to form the core of our notion of the functions an autobiographical text must perform. (10)

Following through on this assertion, Bruss elaborates a set of rules by which to identify autobiography as a specific form of human action. These rules, she stresses, indicate the responsibilities of the author with respect to his or her text but also, importantly, they suggest what expectations it is reasonable for a reader to hold. Hence, generic definition emerges in Bruss' system as a consensus about roles within a particular type of discursive situation: an understanding between the autobiographical writer and reader. With this shift in generic focus, the question becomes not "What *is* autobiography?" but rather, "What does an autobiography *do*?" Not only "Who does the autobiography refer to?" but also "To whom is the autobiography addressed, and under what conditions?"

In a vein similar to Bruss', theorist Philippe Lejeune, in his essay "The Autobiographical Pact," also builds a reader-based, functional poetics of the genre of autobiography. "*Textually,* I begin from the position of the reader," writes Lejeune,

> it is not a question of starting from within the mind of the author, which indeed poses a problem, nor is it one of establishing the canons of a literary genre. By taking as the starting point the position of the reader, (which is

> mine, the only one I know well), I have the chance to understand more clearly how the texts function (the differences in how they function) since they were written for us, readers, and in reading them, it is we who make them function. (4)

Autobiography, he goes on to explain, is also not to be defined according to any formal textual properties but instead according to the promises made by the author, to the reader, through the use of proper names. A given text is an autobiography, according to Lejeune, if there is an identity between author, narrator and protagonist, an identity which is guaranteed by the "signature" on the title page. Hence, generic definition becomes firmly rooted in the reader, emerging as a function of "the type of reading it engenders, the credence it exudes, and the qualities that are manifested in the critical response to autobiographies" (30).

Taking a slightly different route, Janet Varner Gunn also underscores the role of the reader and the reading process in autobiography. "Genre," she asserts, "...is first of all an instrument of reading, not primarily a formula for writing" (21). In her book *Autobiography: Towards a Poetics of Experience,* Gunn draws upon hermeneutics and phenomenology to develop a model in which autobiography is defined as an ongoing life-process characterized by three distinct, but interrelated interpretive moments: the autobiographical impulse (the urge to make sense of one's own subjectivity and relationship with the world–an act of cultural self-reading), the autobiographical perspective (the shaping and display of the autobiographical impulse through spoken or written narrative), and the autobiographical response (the appropriation of this life-narrative by the reader–who may also be the autobiographer herself) (12-13).[1]

Autobiography in this scheme is not simply a text produced at a given juncture in a person's life, but an ongoing process of self-interpretation, a process in which the act of reading assumes prominence. "Rather than starting from the private act of a self writing," comments Gunn, "I begin from the cultural act of a self reading" (8). And if it is such reading which triggers the act of autobiography, it is also reading, or more precisely the continual re-reading of one's own–and other people's–narratives, which provides the impetus for further display. "Autobiography completes no pictures" (25).

Together, these theorists of the genre have succeeded in redirecting critical attention towards the reader in and of autobiography. More recently, interest has been focussed on the "real" reader of the autobiographical text: the person who holds the autobiographical text in hand, as well as the person who writes about that text. Sidonie Smith asks the question: "Who speaks in the autobiographical text? But also who speaks *about* the autobiographical text?" ("The [Female] Subject" 126, my emphasis). A new type of criticism–"autobiographical" or "personalist" criticism as it is sometimes called–brings to the fore the reader/critic's personal engagement with the autobiographical text, demonstrating that the reading of an autobiography is always (whether acknowledged or not) also in itself an autobiographical act. No autobiography stands independently; instead, through the process of reading and interpretation, it becomes part of a network of autobiographical subjectivities. Carolyn Steedman's autobiographical reading of her mother's biography, *Landscape for a Good Woman,* and Helen Buss' personal introductions in her study, *Mapping Ourselves: Canadian Women's Autobiography*, are good examples of this recent approach.[2]

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[1] Gunn's hermeneutical model of autobiography is very similar to those of narrative identity developed by the hermeneutic philosophers, which I discuss in Chapter 3.

Be it the linguistic "you," the addressee of the autobiographical speech-act, the co-participant in a quasi-legal "pact," the autobiographer herself at a reflective phase on the phenomenological journey of life-writing, or the personally engaged critic, the reader has become firmly enmeshed in current theory of autobiography. And implicit to this new attention to the reader is an acknowledgment of the intersubjective performativity of the autobiographical act. As Sidonie Smith writes:

> Everyday, in disparate venues, in response to sundry occasions, in front of precise audiences (even if an audience of one), people assemble, if only

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[2] This recognition of the autobiographical dimension of criticism has also spilled over into literary criticism in general. Nicole Ward Jouve presents a collection of autobiographical readings of literature, appending to her main title, *White Woman Speaks with Forked Tongue* the subtitle: *Criticism as Autobiography.* Nancy Miller examines her own subjectivity as a literary critic in *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Autobiographical* Acts. And in the last couple of years, several collections of autobiographical critical essays have found publication, including Diane Freedman et al's *The Intimate Critique: Autobiographical Literary Criticism.* A hybrid of reader-response and feminist criticism, this new approach places the critical spotlight on the very scene of reading, exploring the socio-political and subjective issues at stake in the process of textual interpretation.

> temporarily, a "life" to which they assign narrative coherence and meaning and through which they position themselves in historically specific identities. Whatever that occasion or that audience, the autobiographical speaker becomes a perfomative subject. ("Performativity" 17)

Self-narration is, therefore, not only a mode of self-reference, but also a form of action, and not only a form of action, but also a means of social and cultural interaction.

Intersubjectivity, Performativity and Women's Autobiography

This intersubjective dimension of autobiography is especially salient in autobiographies written by women, and has been particularly emphasized in feminist poetics of the genre. In her pioneering essay on women's autobiography, "Autobiographies of Women Writers," Mary G. Mason suggests that there are distinct gender differences to be found in autobiographies written by women and men. Whereas men use the genre to stress their individuality, she holds, women demonstrate more fluidity in their identity, defining themselves in terms of their relationships with others: "...the self-discovery of female identity seems to acknowledge the real presence and recognition of another consciousness, and the disclosure of the female self is linked to the identification of some 'other'" (210). Unlike Rousseau, who at the outset of his autobiography takes the step of setting himself apart from all others with the words, "I am like no one I have met. I might even venture to say that there is no one else like me in the whole world" (*Confessions* 17), the women autobiographers studied by Mason move in the opposite direction, explicitly addressing their words to significant others and actively incorporating them into the fabric of their life-texts.

Another theorist of women's autobiography, Susan Stanford Friedman echoes Mason's critique of the individualist model of autobiography as a gender-neutral poetics in her essay "Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice." Drawing upon the findings of psychoanalyst Nancy Chodorow, who suggests that because they retain their primary attachment to their mothers, girls tend to grow up with more permeable ego boundaries than do boys, Friedman claims that male-biased, individualist models of autobiography are simply inappropriate to the study of women's autobiography. Quoting but reversing the words of Georges Gusdorf, who in his essay "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography" identifies "conscious awareness of the singularity of each individual life" as a cultural precondition for autobiography (Gusdorf 29), Friedman writes, in rebuttal, that the female autobiographical self "often does not oppose herself to all others, does not feel herself to exist outside of others, and still less against others, but very much *with* others in an interdependent existence that asserts its rhythms everywhere in the community" (Friedman 56).

This awareness of and interdependence with others is especially evident in the tradition of women's spiritual autobiography. In "Quest for Community:

Spiritual Autobiographies of Eighteenth-Century Quaker and Puritan Women in America," Carol Edkins notes a process of community-building taking place through the autobiographical act. Instead of serving to set the autobiographer apart as a distinct and independent individual, the spiritual narrative, with its formulaic patterning and its emphasis on the commonalities of religious experience, functions as a bridge which connects the female autobiographer to a larger circle of believers. "In the case of Puritan women," Edkins points out as an example,

> the initial bond with the community was created by going through a process of conversion.... Having testified to her community via an autobiographical act, either oral or written, she then became an acknowledged visible saint, a member of the Elect. (41)

The direction of the autobiography for these women is clearly toward, rather than away from, the community of others. And here autobiography clearly functions as an illocutionary, or performative, act.

In her study of twentieth-century women's confessional writing, Rita Felski discerns a similar other-orientedness. These autobiographical texts, which foreground especially the most personal and intimate details of the author's life, do not serve to set apart and uphold the exceptional individual; on the contrary, they function to delineate and describe the very problems and experiences which bind women together (Felski 94). In Felski's words, "...it is the *representative* aspects of experience, rather than those that mark the protagonist/narrator as unique, which are emphasized in relation to a notion of a communal female identity" (95). Female autobiographical identity is acquired through a process of identification with (rather than distantiation from) and affirmation (rather than negation) of the larger community of others--a community which in this case is specifically female. What Felski suggests is that for many women, particularly feminist women, the implied audience in their autobiographies--the readership sought out--is female.

Patrocinio Schweickart addresses this issue of gender and writing/reading in her essay, "Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading." Examining the dynamics of the reading situation, with an ear attuned to questions of gender, Schweickart concludes that in contrast to the dual hermeneutic involved in their reading of androcentric texts (in which a splitting takes place in the female reader, who identifies with the female characters but must repress that identification in order also to identify with the male hero), women readers experience a more direct hermeneutic when reading women's texts. "If feminist readings of male texts are motivated by the need to disrupt the process of immasculation," she writes,

> feminist readings of female texts are motivated by the need 'to connect,' to recuperate, or to formulate...the context, the tradition, that would link

> women writers to one another, to women readers and critics, and to the larger community of women. (32)[3]

The relationship, hence, between the woman writer and the woman reader, according to Schweickart, is a dialogic one: "the two women are engaged in intimate conversation" (35).

Schweickart asks the question, "Is there something distinctively female...in this dialogic model?" (38). She does not entirely answer her own question, but she does put forward this theory of reading as an alternative and antidote to mainstream reader-response theories which, she argues, tend to be preoccupied with issues of control and partition, and rarely take gender into account (38). This dialogic model of reading and response does, indeed, appear to have relevance to the tradition of women's autobiography. If, as Mason, Friedman, Edkins and Felski suggest, women's autobiography is characterized by an acknowledgement of the intersubjective nature of female identity, and by a desire to use the autobiographical act as a means of fostering community, then Schweickart's model of reading suggests how, practically speaking, that objective is achieved.

Sidonie Smith asks a question similar to Schweickart's regarding the dialogic model, particularly as it figures in theories of women's autobiography.[4]

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[3] Schweickart borrows from Judith Fetterly (*The Resisting Reader*) in her use of the terms "resisting reader" and the process of "immasculation."

[4] The dialogic model which I've outlined here is one of several put forward by feminist scholars to theorize gender difference in autobiography (or, as Domna Stanton terms it, "genderic differences"). For a good introduction and overview of the various approaches, see Shirley Neuman's "Autobiography and Questions of Gender: An Introduction," Sidonie Smith's introductory chapter in

> Is female preoccupation with the other an essential dynamic of psychobiography or a culturally conditioned manifestation of the ideology of gender that associates female difference with attentiveness to the other? Or does all autobiographical practice proceed by means of a self/other intersubjectivity and intertextuality? (*Poetics* 18)

My answer to this question would be the latter: that *all* autobiography is indeed intersubjective and intertextual in character, and that women's autobiographical writing, perhaps for the very psychological and cultural reasons to which Smith alludes, tends to be distinct from men's in that it emphasizes, rather than represses, these features. One of the important advantages of studying women's life-writing, therefore, is its ability, because of this very difference, to introduce an alternative vantage point on, and to suggest a way out of, some of the theoretical impasses which currently beset the (primarily masculinist) field of autobiography studies.

Poststructuralism and the Autobiographical Subject

Theoretical studies of women's autobiography, with their examination of the intersubjective and performative dimensions of female autobiographical writing repeatedly run up against, and make discoveries inconsistent with, the figure of the independent, self-contained and unitary subject presumed in traditional humanist

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A Poetics of Women's Autobiography, and Domna Stanton's "Autogynography: Is the Subject Different?"

studies of the genre. Friedman's quarrel with Gusdorf is a good example of this. As Sidonie Smith comments, in *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography,*

> In privileging the autonomous or metaphysical self as the agent of its own achievement and in frequently situating that self in an adversarial stance toward the world, "autobiography" promotes a conception of the human being that valorizes individual integrity and separateness and devalues personal and communal interdependency. Yet...that conception of selfhood is decidedly male-identified. (39)

Feminist scholars are not the only ones to call into question this traditional autobiographical self. Approaching the question from a very different intellectual milieu, poststructuralist theorists of the genre have also reacted with skepticism towards this figure of the independent, unitary, and originary autobiographical self.

Recent shifts in philosophical thinking about the nature of language and subjectivity have rendered problematic past assumptions about the referentiality of language and have destabilized the ontological subject hitherto presumed to be the source of and authority over its own thoughts and self-descriptions. Autobiography studies have taken heed of the theoretical critiques raised by poststructuralism, and some of its more radical proponents have approached the genre with a new defiance born of skepticism: calling into question autobiography's very status as a distinct genre and considering it instead as a form of writing like any other, with no privileged claims to reference. Michael Sprinker, for example, in his essay "Fictions of the Self: The End of Autobiography," borrows from Foucault, Barthes, Lacan, and Derrida in order to deconstruct the originary autobiographical self. "The origin and the end of autobiography converge in the very act of writing," he declares, "....for no autobiography can take place except within the boundaries of a writing where concepts of subject, self, and author collapse into the act of producing a text" (342).

Paul de Man, in his well known essay, "Autobiography as De-facement," takes a tack similar to Sprinker. Abandoning what he deems the futile project of generic definition ("...autobiography lends itself poorly to generic definition; each specific instance seems to be an exception to the norm; the works themselves always seem to shade off into neighboring or even incompatible genres..." [920]), de Man goes on to destabilize also the notion of a self-revealing autobiographical self, positing instead a poststructuralist subject--a cipher held hostage to the endless deferral and undecidability of language. According to de Man, language ultimately works to *conceal* rather than reveal: "To the extent that language is figure," he writes, "...it is indeed not the thing itself but the representation, the picture of the thing and, as such, it is silent, mute as pictures are mute. Language, as trope, is always privative" (930). Thus, in the very gesture of revealing a self, autobiography paradoxically does the opposite: it obscures and erases. De Man concludes his essay by summarizing this contradiction, this impossibility (as he sees it) of the autobiographical task: "Autobiography veils a defacement of the mind of which it is itself the cause" (930).

Theoretically sophisticated autobiographers have sometimes played on this poststructuralist double-bind of language, engendering a new breed of what Germaine Bree terms "anti-autobiographies" (9). Parodic and subversive, such autobiographies (amongst which Bree includes those by Roland Barthes, Andre Malraux and Michel Leiris) purposely thwart the reader's expectations and deny self-revelation in the guise of providing it. *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* provides a particularly compelling example of "anti-autobiography." Often championed as a contemporary classic of postmodern autobiography, Barthes' text presents a virtuoso performance of de Manian "de-facement." Yet, despite the brilliance of its theoretical posturing and the dexterity of its referential evasiveness, Barthes' autobiography nevertheless also betrays, in spite of itself, a very un-de Manian persistence of autobiographical subjectivity. Though language may defer and destabilize, as the poststructuralists would have it, it cannot--even in Barthes' case--entirely conceal and erase.

"I do not say: 'I am going to describe myself' but: 'I am writing a text, and I call it R. B.' I shift from imitation (from description) and entrust myself to nomination. Do I not know that, *in the field of the subject, there is no referent?*" (56). With these words Barthes, in true poststructuralist fashion, baldly breaks the autobiographical pact. As Paul Smith comments,

> Generally, the autobiographer has implicitly seen him/herself as the whole and coherent human being who underwrites, subscribes to the possibility of a knowledge about the self; the view of language that is involved there is one where language is little more than a vehicle capable of carrying a reflective knowledge. In such autobiographical places the reader is offered some kind of cohesion of the writing "subject" which is guaranteed by the writing signature, by the name which is attached to the text. The reader is asked to submit to a fiction which is then legalized. Barthes, on the other hand, consistently refuses validation of that legally recognizable self. (104)[5]

"Roland Barthes" is a text and not a person, Barthes asserts; between the text and the life, between the fragments of text which comprise the book, he insists, there is only a void. "To write by fragments: the fragments are then so many stones on the perimeter of a circle: I spread myself around: my whole little universe in crumbs; at the center, what?" (92-93). Speaking into the "enunciatory abyss" (66), Barthes "freewheels" in language (56), brilliantly playing with autobiographical conventions in order to subvert them. But one senses that this play is not entirely exuberant: this is no pleasure text.

Between the fragments, from within those voids which defy enunciation, the silence does speak, and it speaks of estrangement. "At the center, what?" asks Barthes. As if in answer to this question, Paul John Eakin, in *Touching the World,* points to the fragment, "A memory of childhood." Playing at a construction site, the young Barthes finds himself trapped in a hole:

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[5] Smith summarizes here the "autobiographical pact" put forward by Bruss and Lejeune.

> ...all the children climbed out except me--I couldn't make it. From the brink up above, they teased me: lost! alone! spied on! excluded! (to be excluded is not to be outside, it is to be *alone in the hole,* imprisoned under the open sky: *precluded);* (Barthes 121-122)

Eakin notes of this passage that "the style is--for Barthes, at any rate--stripped down and direct, an utterance of raw emotion in which the urgency of a traumatic memory of abandonment and rejection seems to inhibit his characteristic impulse for linguistic invention (his customary display of power)" (10).[6]

Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes is punctuated by several such passages: emotional, often painful memories which disrupt and provide a counterpoint to his other, more cerebral forays into language. "The 'I' who writes is motivated simultaneously by contrary impulses toward concealment and display," comments Eakin (13), and what these passages--particularly the "memory from childhood"--fail to conceal is a profound sense of isolation from others, an estrangement which the other, more intellectual passages on language masterfully theorize, but in no way assuage. In the end, Barthes, the self-deconstructing autobiographer, remains "*alone in the hole*," imprisoned, rather than re-connected, by his own text and its alienating theories. Remarks Eakin, quoting J. Gratton: "...we see Barthes not as the cool Olympian theorist of postmodernism but as a more troubled, unquiet figure struggling against 'the indifference of language to our desire for self-expression'" (16).

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[6] Eakin links this passage, with its implicit *cri de coeur,* to one of the images collected in the opening section of the book: "The caption reads, 'The demand for love,' and the photograph of the eight-year-old 'R. B.' held in his mother's arms suggests in the very size of the child--too big to be carried--something of the pathos involved." It is significant that it is Barthes' mother who emerges as the rescuer in the "*alone in the hole*" memory; this photograph, in so poignantly invoking the mother, Eakin suggests, "captures the depth of the subject's need for love." (11n).

It is interesting, and perhaps not surprising, to note that in his later years Barthes grew more uneasy about and began to reject the rigid poststructuralist theories which had informed *Roland Barthes*. J. Gerald Kennedy, a participant in Barthes' seminar, "Preparation of/for the Novel," at the College de France in 1978-1979, notes a distinct and dramatic shift in Barthes' thinking at that time. In the opening lecture, Kennedy reports in his essay, "Roland Barthes, Autobiography, and the End of Writing," that Barthes

> made an unexpected confession: he had recently concluded that his previous writing amounted to a betrayal of his true concerns. Saddened by a sense of failure, Barthes expressed the desire to "escape from the prison house of critical metalanguage" and through simpler, more compassionate language to close the gap between private experience and public discourse. (383)

At the time, Barthes was planning to attempt a new form of writing: he wanted to write a novel. "Alluding to a recent sorrow, which evidently lay behind the novelistic scheme," Kennedy explains, "Barthes mused, 'Perhaps the wounds of love can be overcome by the desire to write'" (384). Kennedy biographically interprets this sorrow, this woundedness, as that ensuing from the loss of his mother, someone he had been especially close to, and whom he had nursed through her final days. He also links Barthes' desire to embrace narrative with a life crisis he had experienced several months prior to the seminar, and which, in a moment of candour, he had related to his students. It was a crisis of mortality, one in which he had experienced a powerful consciousness of his impending death, and after which "Barthes felt a remorse about his career, perceiving an absolute rupture between his emotional life and his mental life (a dichotomy he had often ridiculed as simplistic)" (Kennedy 384-385).

In his subsequent (and last) book, *Camera Lucida*, Kennedy suggests, Barthes found voice for some of the narrative yearnings implicit in his (never achieved) aspiration to write a novel. "In place of his 'philosophy of disintegration,'" remarks Kennedy, "one finds in *La chambre claire* a resolute conception of essence, brought into focus by the affliction of its loss: grief" (390). In the second half of this book, Barthes narrates his search for a truly defining photograph of his mourned for mother. His quest is successful:

> There I was, alone in the apartment where she had died, looking at these pictures of my mother, one by one, under the lamp, gradually moving back in time with her, looking for the truth of the face I had loved. I found it. (*Camera* 67)

If the "*alone in the hole*" fragment signals the acute alienation and theoretical torment of his earlier foray into autobiography, this narrative of restoration marks the moment when Barthes does come to find in language a means of connecting, of bridging the "enunciatory abyss" in order to find and give expression to the truth of his relationship to his mother, to the reality of his love. Kennedy sees a closure in this act: "...he finally arrived at the concept of soul in defiance of his own theory of the subject, perceiving the insufficiency of the latter to account for the truth of the *Jardin d'Hiver* photo" (390).

Though one person's disillusionment with a particular theory does not provide warrant to dismiss it in its entirety, Roland Barthes' experience is instructive and does suggest some of the limitations of poststructuralism, particularly as a framework for understanding autobiography. If traditional poetics of the genre, with their humanist concept of self "as an indivisible entity, ontologically and textually self-identical while at the same time individual and distinct from others" (Neuman, "Autobiography" 214), fail to address the intersubjective dimension of autobiographical writing (particularly as it emerges in the life-writing of many women), then so do the anti-humanist poetics of poststructuralism. With their insistence that language is the only reality, and that the question of extra-textual reference is unknowable and hence irrelevant, poststructuralist theories of the genre become just as hostile to the possibility of intersubjectivity as the humanist ones they seek to undo. With its refusal to look beyond the text, such theory risks becoming cynical and sterile in the face of experience: the question of real embodied persons, with their joys and pains and their desire and need for community, is dismissed as moot and all that is offered in its place is the dubious comfort of a self-deceptive illusion.

Although it has much to contribute to questions of the intertextuality of autobiography and the complexities of our construction in language, poststructuralism on its own stands as a barren theoretical approach which dismisses too many important elements of autobiographical identity. And despite its theoretical impetus towards dismantlement and displacement "...poststructuralist poetics of autobiography have, in *practice* if not in theory," Shirley Neuman comments, "produced a 'subject' almost as hegemonically powerful as the humanist 'self' they attempt to destabilize" ("Autobiography" 215).

It is this hegemony that dialogical models of women's autobiography have sought to disrupt. With their emphasis upon intersubjectivity and their insistence upon the autobiographical act as a form of action and community building, these studies suggest an alternative to both the humanist and poststructuralist poetics. Neither the fiercely individualistic self of humanism, nor the humiliated and estranged non-self of poststructuralism, the autobiographer in this model becomes a self-in-progress, aware of her relationship with others, and active in using the autobiographical act as a means of forging and fostering those connections.

Autobiographies of Trauma and Healing

In her development of a "poetics of experience" for the genre of autobiography, Janet Varner Gunn suggests that trust plays an important role in the autobiographical act. "The common world of culture which shapes and is shaped by experience is, finally, a fiduciary context within which one's sensation of reality arises out of the trust one can have in and within this world," she writes. "As a poetics of experience, autobiography is a human, cultural, and religious act taking place within this context of trust..." (27-28). As an act of trust, she argues, autobiography signals a resistance to the temptation to despair and succumb to a world of loss and meaninglessness (28).

This perspective on the genre is in marked contrast to that of de Man and the earlier Barthes. For them, the autobiographical act cannot be trusted, and aspirations towards self-expression and intersubjective connection are to be dismissed as naive. "Death is a displaced name for a linguistic predicament, and the restoration of mortality by autobiography...deprives and disfigures to the precise extent that it restores," pronounces de Man with finality (930). Barthes echoes his hopeless words in an estranging third-person reflection on autobiographical naming: "He is troubled by any *image* of himself, suffers when he is named. He finds the perfection of a human relationship in this vacancy of the image: to abolish–in oneself, between oneself and others–*adjectives*; a relationship which adjectivizes is on the side of the image, on the side of domination, of death" (*Roland Barthes* 43). These comments clearly exhibit a disillusionment with language and a loss of faith in its emancipatory power. Language, as Barthes later was to comment, becomes a prisonhouse in this view: an oppressive taskmaster which leaves no room for personal agency. While it is clearly able to reflect and represent experiences of pain (and this is somewhat ironic, given poststructuralism's rejection of mimetic theories of the genre), autobiography, according to this perspective, is ultimately powerless when it comes to relieving it.

Gunn, however, suggests a different way of thinking about experiences of suffering and their relationship to the autobiographical act. She compares autobiography, with its sometimes painful recollection of times past, with the phenomenon of the phantom limb:

> The amputee continues to experience the "presence" of the limb which has been removed, neither as a result of self-delusion nor as a result of a conscious decision to ignore a painful experience. The phantom limb results instead from the self's *prior* commitment "to a certain physical and inter-human world" and its continuing "to tend toward [that] world despite handicaps and amputations..." (Gunn 28, quoting from Merleau-Ponty 81)

This act of commitment and trust, implicit in the process of recording what we might call "phantom memories," is especially evident in the autobiographies I am looking at here.

What emerges most powerfully in these autobiographies of trauma and healing is a will to survive, and a commitment to the possibility of some sort of healing and wholeness of self. Autobiographies of emotional handicap and spiritual amputation, they are examples, in quite a literal sense, of survival literature. Like the phantom limb Gunn describes, these autobiographies, in a single gesture, poignantly bear witness to the experience of loss, while at the same time attesting to a vision of wholeness and healing.

Autobiographies of trauma and healing are distinct in several ways. Unlike exceptional or exemplary autobiographies, which are written by those who have achieved some sort of prior fame or public recognition, these autobiographies are penned by women who exist outside the public eye; they are "unknown" in the deepest sense–to others, but also, importantly, to themselves. As well, instead of writing in their twilight years, reflecting on a life near completion, these autobiographers write in the midst of their lives, heralding with their texts a symbolic re-entry into life, and selfhood.

And even more so than with other autobiographies, these narratives of trauma and healing highlight the presence of the reader. Writing in the aftermath of, and in response to traumatic circumstances, finding themselves in positions of emotional estrangement and isolation from others, and needing the support of an affirmative other, these women take the step of writing that necessary other into their text as an implied reader, thereby setting into motion their own processes of healing. These autobiographies very clearly inscribe the reader within the text, but also go beyond the text, hailing real readers into response and action. In so doing, the autobiography functions as a bridge, linking the autobiographer to a real community which offers support and solidarity, and, as Rita Felski describes, reinforcing that community by identifying issues of common concern.[7] Hence, these autobiographies, through their interpellation of readers, become agents of individual healing, but also catalysts for social change: the personal is the political.

It is this sociopolitical dimension which makes these autobiographies function as what Sidonie Smith calls "autobiographical manifestos." Poignantly telling stories of personal trauma and pain, these narratives also implicitly interrogate and critique the social and institutional structures complicit in their disempowerment. Hence, these autobiographies are not only performative at the personal, therapeutic level, but also at the political level: they are texts of resistance. In *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body,* Smith comments that

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[7] Rita Felski describes this process in the context of feminist autobiographers writing for female audiences. I'd like to broaden the context. Though the autobiographies I look at certainly do address "women's issues," and have been instrumental in mobilizing female communities, they also go beyond that scope, addressing also issues of broader social concern.

> ...autobiographical writing has played and continues to play a role in emancipatory politics. Autobiographical practices become occasions for restaging subjectivity, and autobiographical strategies become occasions for the staging of resistance.....Purposeful, bold, contentious, the autobiographical manifesto contests the old inscriptions, the old histories, the old politics, the *ancien regime*, by working to dislodge the hold of the universal subject through an expressly political collocation of a new "I." (156-157)

Unlike the individualist humanist self, the "subjects" of these autobiographies of trauma and healing are both singular and collective, speaking on behalf of others in the very process of narrating the circumstances of a particular life. And unlike the fragmented poststructuralist subject, these autobiographers, though often experiencing psychological and emotional fragmentation, and sometimes introducing that discontinuity into their narratives, nevertheless refuse the hopeless pronouncements of poststructuralism and move forward instead into the possibility of healing, reconnection, and social change. "Here the 'I' does not write under the sign of desire or the sign of anxiety," remarks Smith. "Rather the 'I' writes under the sign of hope and what Hélène Cixous calls 'the very possibility of change,' emphasizing the generative and prospective thrust of autobiography" (*Autobiography* 163).

These autobiographies of trauma and healing, then, represent a sub-genre of life-writing which especially exemplifies the intersubjectivity characteristic of women's autobiography, and which is implicit to all autobiography. With their emphasis upon the figure of the reader, the more reader-based, functional poetics of the genre are most appropriate as models for understanding the significance of these autobiographies. My questions, like Elizabeth Bruss', are not so much related to aesthetic form, but to function: How is the reader implied and inscribed in the autobiographical text? What is the relationship between the textually inscribed reader and the real reader? How does the textual/real reader figure in the processes of healing described in, and facilitated by, these autobiographies? What role do the autobiographical text and its readership play in the creation and maintenance of healing communities, and as catalysts for social change?

By addressing these questions, I hope better to understand not only these particular texts, but the genre as a whole. Far from being theoretical anomalies, I suggest, these autobiographies of trauma and healing, emerging as they do from extreme circumstances, functioning as "limit cases" one might say, can shed some light on elements latent in all autobiography. These autobiographies not only contribute something to our understanding of life-writing, but they also tell us something important about the ongoing, intersubjective, and constitutive nature of self-narration. It is a case where the apparent exception(al) proves the rule. Gunn suggests that autobiography, because it serves as a "fundamental gesture of resistance to mutilation," be generically classified as "survival-literature" (28). Does it not make sense, then, to visit the overt examples of survival autobiography in order better to understand the genre as a whole?

"How to construct the bridge": Articulation and the Listening Other in Marie Cardinal's *The Words to Say It*

Marie Cardinal's *The Words to Say It* is a daughter's tale of maternal abuse. Plagued by an unstoppable flow of uterine blood, haunted by a hallucinatory madness she calls "the Thing," the woman in Cardinal's book, in a state of desperation, seeks out help from a psychoanalyst. What follows is a seven-year journey of healing, in which Cardinal remembers and comes to reconceive the scenes of her childhood. Recognizing as she hadn't before the psychic damage inflicted upon her by her mother's ambivalence towards her, she comes to understand the legacy of death–and silence–she had inherited upon learning of her mother's failed abortion. In narrating and renarrating her life in the analyst's office, Cardinal succeeds in reversing her history by aborting the madness, and giving birth, in its place, to herself.

Speaking and writing play a central part in Cardinal's experience of rebirth. If it is words–primarily her mother's words–which initially send her into a psychic tailspin, it is also the curative words uttered in the analyst's office, and later the novelistic "divagations in the notebooks" (215), which help her find her way out of the abyss. As the title of the book suggests, articulation–finding "the words to say it"–becomes integral to her journey of healing and self discovery. What Cardinal's book so eloquently and powerfully demonstrates is this fundamental link between language and subjectivity. Emotional health, and indeed selfhood itself, involve a process of positioning oneself as a subject in language; it is a matter transcending the passivity of merely being spoken by words and taking the active step of learning to speak. And this is precisely what the woman in Cardinal's book comes to achieve: a speaking self.

"Words were boxes, they contained material which was alive"

Up until her analysis, when for the first time she discovered the freeing and self-naming power of words, Cardinal's relationship with language was a strained and troubled one. Whenever she wrote--for she had been both a university student and a lecturer--her use of words was ruled by conformity and convention. "It's true that I could write proper sentences and knew grammar well, having taught it for a number of years before becoming seriously ill," she remarks. "That's what writing was for me: to put correctly into words in accordance with strict rules of grammar references and information that had been given to me" (215). As with her writing, so with herself. As a girl, she had both consciously and unconsciously conformed to others'--particularly her mother's--expectations of her: consciously, in straining to embody the values and behaviours upheld by her class and inculcated by her mother, and unconsciously, by psychically killing herself to become the aborted fetus so desired, and the dead younger sister so passionately mourned, by her mother. Instead of learning to embrace language as a creative avenue of self-expression and as a link to the world of others, Cardinal experiences it in her early years as an oppressive enemy: words became nightmarish "monsters...the SS of the unconscious, driving back the thought of the living into the prisons of oblivion" (240). Rather than issuing forth from her in a healthy outpouring of self-affirmation, words instead mutated themselves into a diseased flow of blood. Complicit with the madness of "the Thing" which came to haunt her so terrifyingly, words served only to torment and silence her:

> Fibroid uterus. What words! Caverns coated with algae flowing through the blood. Monstrously swollen artery. Pustular toad. Octopus.
>
> For the mentally ill, words, like objects, are as much alive as people or animals. They palpitate, they vanish or expand....For me at that time, a word isolated from the mass of other words started to live, becoming an important thing, becoming even the most important thing, inhabiting me, torturing me, never leaving me, reappearing in my dreams, waiting for me to wake up. (8)

During her analysis, Cardinal comes to recognize the moment in which words dealt to her their harshest blow: in a devastating scene at the curb of a busy street, her mother tells of her repeated attempts to abort her. "If I could have known the harm she'd do me," writes Cardinal,

> if instead of having no more than a premonition, I'd been able to imagine the incurable and ghastly wound she was going to inflict on me, I'd have sent forth a howling....I'd have shrieked even to death, never having heard the words she was about to inflict on me like so many mutilating swords.
>
> There on the street, in a few sentences, she put out my eyes, pierced my eardrums, scalped me, cut off my hands, shattered my kneecaps, tortured my stomach, and mutilated my genitals. (134-135)

"It is little wonder Cardinal did not consider words as charms!" Patricia Elliot comments. "Rather, they were the uniquely human instruments of torture, of what separates or maintains the alienation of self and other" (73). Instead of the self-protective howling retrospectively imagined by the adult woman, the girl's response at the time was an overwhelming silence. As Elliot points out, "Cardinal's bewildered and speechless response to her mother is represented in the text by three dots surrounded by quotation marks ("..."). This unusual treatment of silence in what is a dialogue produces an unsettling effect on the reader and conveys the presence of a powerful affect" (73).

It is when Cardinal enters into analysis that language begins to work in her favour, rather than against her. Words, she begins to believe, and begins to discover in her own experience, have the power not only to destroy, but to heal. Of her first meeting with the doctor Cardinal writes:

> Prostrate as I was, withdrawn into my own universe, how to find the words which would flow between us? How to construct the bridge which would join the intense to the calm, the clear to the obscure, which could span this sewer, this river filled with decomposing matter, this treacherous current of fear, that separated the doctor and me, the others and me? (3)

With the listening ear of the doctor, the first person, she says, who treats her as a normal person (26), Cardinal dares hope that such a connection might be made: "Perhaps there was a path between myself and another. If only it were true. If only I could talk to someone who would really listen to me!" (26).

With the doctor as her listening ally, Cardinal finds the courage she needs to embark on a path of healing. To this silent man in his consulting room at the end of the cul-de-sac, Cardinal entrusts her story, and in so doing begins to unlock her repressed past. The doctor listens, but also demands from her a new narrative to replace the old. When she begins her habitual recitation about the blood--a story outlining the details of her ailment, repeated countless times to numerous doctors and specialists--he stops her short, and insists that she talk of something else. She is stunned at his response, but discovers that almost immediately the haemorrhaging ceases. From that point onward, it is words which flow from her instead of blood: cathartic and healing words, "words which...pour out in torrents" (37).

Having been hitherto only associated with pain and alienation, words for Cardinal take on a new role, becoming powerful instruments of healing. Adhering to the doctor's classical psychoanalytic instructions to "Talk, say whatever comes into your head" (65), Cardinal discovers in her own utterances a means of confronting her hallucinations and ridding herself of the madness. "It was the only remedy he gave me and I gorged myself on it. Perhaps it was my weapon against the Thing: that flood of words, that maelstrom, that mass of words, that hurricane!" (65). Over the next seven years of psychoanalysis, the torrent of words continues. Returning three times a week to the little office at the end of the cul-de-sac, Cardinal revisits the scenes of her childhood and in the process of verbalizing them to her doctor, is able better to understand them, and weave them into a more liberating life narrative. Finding "the words to say it" in the initial years of analysis meant remembering and finding words for painful and repressed memories in order to pry loose their emotional stranglehold on her: articulation as a form of exorcism. Words, as she says, were weapons against the madness, and in due course these cathartic words did succeed in claiming victory over "the Thing."

After a rush of exuberance in the aftermath of "the Thing's" departure, however, Cardinal falls back into silence. Having successfully purged the madness through the outpouring of words, Cardinal finds that she has also emptied her very self. Wandering in an existential vacuum, she cries, "The void. Who was I? No one" (164):

> I no longer had any hold on myself. I was nobody. I had no desires, no will, no likes, no dislikes. I had been fashioned to resemble as closely as possible a human model which I had not chosen and which did not suit me....Now it seemed to me that by putting out the eye at the end of the tube I had aborted my self....Everything I was, was destroyed, and in its place was zero... (164-165)[1]

After this prolonged period of silence, Cardinal does make her way back to language. This time, however, words come to play a constructive rather than a primarily cathartic role. Gradually, Cardinal again finds "the words to say it," but this time the words she finds are those which enable her to discover the self that had been effaced by the madness. "Words! I had stumbled against them when I was at my sickest, I found them now that I was almost cured" (239). Having, through the telling of them, cast off disabling narratives of self, Cardinal begins the creative process of renarrating her life and renaming herself. Words, she discovers at this point, are powerful constructors of reality: "Had I ever suspected their importance? I had written books with words which were objects. I had arranged them in an order I considered coherent, suitable and aesthetically right. I had not seen that they contained material which was alive" (241). In finding the words to name herself--her strengths, her weaknesses, her likes, her dislikes and her feelings--Cardinal discovers that she, too, is alive. Through the process of articulation, she gives birth to herself.[2]

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[1] The "eye at the end of the tube" here is her father's. Cardinal is referring to an early childhood memory of having been photographed by him while urinating.

Probably the most liberating phase of naming arrives for Cardinal when she finds the words to name her body. If her mother's words at the curbside were experienced as a physical maiming, with the effect of estranging the young girl from her own body, Cardinal's later words return that body to her. A particularly important turning point for her takes place when she is able to overcome her inbred feelings of shame and social propriety, and go on to name and claim ownership even of the most hitherto rejectionable parts of herself:

> ...I understood there was an entire area of the body which I had never accepted and which somehow, never belonged to me. The zone between my legs could be only expressed in shameful words, and had never been the object of my conscious thought. No word contained my anus (since this term was only acceptable in a scientific or medical context, it constituted a sickness in itself)....As for what passed through there, I could only bring myself to say the 'number two' of my childhood. (240)

Finding words to name what had previously gone un-named, and been deemed unacceptable, gives Cardinal a new sense of wholeness and vitality. Instead of tiptoeing about in a fragile prisonhouse of language, fearful of the un-named and silenced by taboos, Cardinal breaks free by shouting out the forbidden and repressed words. Words become talismans, breaking the spell which has kept her locked in muteness: "I was a red queen in a castle of cards. It was enough to say the word 'shit' free of shame and disgust before what was contained in the word, for the castle to fall down!" (243).

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[2] Phil Powrie explores the significance of "womb" imagery in *The Words to Say It* in his essay, "A womb of one's own: the metaphor of the womb-room as a reading-effect in texts by contemporary French women writers." See also Françoise Lionnet's discussion of the analyst as midwife in *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture.*

"Perhaps there was a path between myself and another"

If words are a crucial element in Cardinal's narrative, the fact that these words have an audience is just as important. For Cardinal, not only finding "the words to say it," but also finding someone who would listen and attend to these words, was crucial. About her analytic insights, she asks herself at one point, "Why wasn't I able, on my own, to come to these conclusions and apply them whenever illness overcame me?" She provides her own answer: "It was because until then I had never spoken to anyone about them [the traumatic memories]. Each terror had been experienced in isolation and immediately repressed as much as possible without ever being understood" (144). For memories to become real, for experiences to become amenable to understanding, they must be articulated, and just as importantly, they must be articulated in the presence of an accepting and receptive other. For Cardinal, the analyst at the end of the cul-de-sac provided the listening ear, became that affirming other necessary for the healing process: "The little doctor was my safety net and the witness of my journeys into the unconscious" (176-177).[3]

The analyst is the first, but not the only receptive "other" described in Cardinal's text: her estranged husband, Jean-Pierre, becomes the second. Part way through her analysis, when she begins to discover the self-inventive power of words, Cardinal begins to explore new ways of using language--she begins to write. This writing is distinct from her words in the analyst's office, and different than any writing she'd done before. "The divagations in the notebooks," she comments, "were made up of the elements of my life which were arranged according to my fancy: going where I pleased, living out moments I had only imagined. I was not in the yoke of truth, as in analysis. I was conscious of being more free than I had been" (215). This writing is different, and also very private. Kept a secret from the doctor and hidden away from all others, it is seen by her eyes only:

> At night and very early in the morning, I wrote. I had a little notebook, and I would write in it. When the notebook was full, I began another. During the day I hid them under my mattress. When I shut myself into my room in the evening I retrieved them with the joy that might have been reserved for a handsome new lover. (215)

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[3] See my discussion of the role of the therapist as witness and therapeutic other in Chapter 5.

When Jean-Pierre comes to visit, these very words do in fact function to bring back to her her previous lover and the joy of a new intimacy between them. Taking the risk of giving him the notebooks to read, Cardinal watches and waits and becomes anxious about his response. When his response does come, it is positive: "He was looking at me intensely. There was tenderness, surprise and also some reserve, the way one looks at someone one doesn't know. Then he reached out his hand, and gently touched my shoulder" (227). Jean-Pierre is moved by the words in the notebook, and responds with admiration, and perhaps most importantly, a new love for her, a changed woman: "'I'm in love with the woman who wrote these pages'" (228). Reading, here, is transformed into an act of loving. Words form an important bridge and foster a relationship.

These two scenes of listening/reading function in a meta-narrative way, pointing beyond themselves to the reading situation of *The Words to Say It* itself. Through her depiction of both the receptive analyst and the responsive husband, Cardinal implicitly hails the reader of *The Words to Say It* as one who, likewise, will be an attentive and supportive reader of her text. As Françoise Lionnet puts it, "The staging of Jean-Pierre as the receptive reader par excellence can be interpreted as *mise en abyme* of the reading process and of its effect as it is encoded in the narrative structure" (198). The analyst hears her spoken words, and facilitates healing. Cardinal's husband reads her first written words, and responds with love. Now the reader of *The Words to Say It* is hailed, and a similarly affirming response is sought.

If the text presents examples of model readers, it also sets up antimodels of reading. Cardinal clearly instructs the reader how *not* to read her book. The analyst, whose "silent, invisible (she cannot see him from the couch), but very attentive presence casts him in the role of midwife who helps the narrator pregnant with her effaced self" (Lionnet 195), for example, stands in contrast to the surgeons and specialists who ignore Cardinal's words, and seek instead to fit her into their own discourses; they stand as those who would tranquillize and excise, rather than help bring to birth. Cardinal implicitly warns the reader, here, what kind of response is not welcome. "As a critic," comments Lionnet, "I can decide to focus on specific aspects of a textual corpus and thus bracket--eliminate or negate--those elements that cannot be integrated into my own theoretical framework. I would then be acting like the surgeon who blithely 'cures' feminine hysteria by doing hysterectomies" (205). This gynecologist who pronounces the diagnosis of "fibroid uterus," and who calls for immediate surgery (7), figures as the antithesis of the analyst. "It is in this implicit contrast between the two doctors," notes Lionnet, "that the narrative signals itself as a communicative act and provides us with the model of reading most appropriate to the 'point' it is trying to make" (195-196). *The Words to Say It,* in other words, seeks out a reader who will be attentive, not interventive–who will listen, rather than prematurely diagnose and dismiss.

More can be said about the type of readership invoked by and in Cardinal's text. Though the two model readers depicted within the narrative are men, the implied audience, the text suggests, is female. The text hails a reader who not only will respond with attentiveness and care–who, like the analyst, will become a sort of midwife to the textual process of rebirth–but one who will also respond with empathy, responding to, but also *identifying with,* the protagonist and her struggles. The ambiguity of the text's generic classification plays an important role in eliciting such readerly identification.

"the 'I' could become 'she,' but 'she' is more myself than 'I'"

Among critics of *The Words to Say It,* the question of the text's generic classification has been an issue for debate. Referred to in its subtitle as "an autobiographical novel," *The Words to Say It* places itself at what Shirley Neuman calls "the nexus of psychoanalysis, autobiography and self-invention" ("'Your Past'" 80n). Commentators, however, have tended to place the text in one or other of these categories. Bruno Bettelheim, in his preface to the book, chooses to view Cardinal's narrative as primarily a clinical document, calling it "the best account of psychoanalysis as seen and experienced by the patient." He continues, "I do not know of any other that would render such a true picture of what the patient's experience of his [sic] analysis is like" (ix). Though the narrative does indeed provide a great deal of insight into the psychoanalytic process, the text itself would seem to reject such a categorization. "For analysis can't be written down," writes Cardinal in *The Words to Say It*. "It would take thousands of pages....Enormous book bloated with blank pages, on which there would be nothing and everything" (248). Elsewhere, in her book *In Other Words,* a work based on an interview with Annie Leclerc and published (in French, as *Autrement Dit)* soon after *The Words to Say It,* Cardinal underscores the fact that *The Words to Say It* stands apart and is distinct from her original experience of psychoanalysis. Talking about her mother's revelation of her repeated attempts to abort her, Cardinal comments:

> [it] didn't have a great importance in my psychoanalysis because I had drawn all possible conclusions about it before beginning treatment....But in writing about it, it became enormous, it occupied a formidable place. (*Other* 21)

Clearly, then, *The Words to Say It* is not simply a case study, or transcript of an analysis, as Bettelheim seems to suggest.

Other critics of *The Words to Say It* do recognize the broader, or at least more complex, generic scope of this text. Marilyn Yalom, Marguerite Le Clezio and Patricia Elliot, for example, while also focusing on the psychoanalytic significance of the narrative (albeit through various theoretical lenses), nevertheless address the narrative as a more broadly defined life-text, rather than simply as a clinical text. As Phil Powrie points out, however, the fictional--or in Neuman's terms, self-inventive--dimension of the text, indicated by the term "novel" in the subtitle, is not fully investigated by these critics: despite this generic marker, they tend to treat the text as a traditional autobiography, making "the assumption that Cardinal and her protagonist are one and the same" ("Reading" 165). What becomes clear, both from Cardinal's subtitle, and from various comments made by her in this and other of her writings, however, is that in *The Words to Say It* the interface between autobiography and fiction is intentionally ambiguous, and the relationship between narrator, protagonist and author, far from simple.

In *In Other Words,* Cardinal explains her own negotiation of that nebulous terrain between autobiography and fiction: "When I write, I always begin with something that I know, that I have lived, then it transforms, opens up, rambles; the 'I' could become 'she,' but 'she' is more myself than 'I.' 'I' is a mask" (21). Like the woman writing in the notebooks, Cardinal the author is not "in the yoke of truth, as in analysis" (*Words* 215); yet, paradoxically, in freeing herself from the conventions of traditional autobiography by taking that detour through fiction, Cardinal suggests that she is even better able to articulate the "truth" of her experience: "'she' is more myself than 'I'" (*Other* 21).

In *The Words to Say It* itself, Cardinal also addresses this issue of writing and representation, and with it the question of narrative identity: "...I promised myself that I would some day write an account of my analysis, and turn it into a novel in which I would tell of the healing of a woman as like me *as if she were my own sister*" (248, my emphasis). The relationship between author and protagonist, and between author and narrator, therefore, is not one of direct identity, or of sameness, but is instead one of familial similarity. "Through a curious multiple-mirror effect," comments Lucille Cairns about this passage,

> we see that the author Cardinal is not identical with her narrator, who in turn is disclaiming identity with the future narrator of her own projected novel...The one stable notion is that of sorority, of close similarity and empathy between Marie Cardinal, her narrator, and her narrator's narrator, whatever the lines ultimately separating them into discrete entities. (282)

Such a narrative strategy, far from suggesting some sort of distortion of the facts, or an untruthful rendering of the autobiographical material, is actually quite reflective of Cardinal's experience of herself. As the story demonstrates, she is a self-in-progress: in moving through the various stages of her life, Cardinal lets go of and distances herself from certain identities, while simultaneously re-embracing them as characters who continue to live in her and with her, making up who she is at the present moment. In the second to last chapter of *The Words to Say It*, in reflecting on the madwoman she once was, Cardinal expresses this somewhat paradoxical notion of the co-habitation of selves: "There is an inestimable distance between the person I was and the person I have become, so that it is no longer even possible to compare the two women....The madwoman and I, however, are but one and the same person, we resemble each other, we love each other, we live together happily" (270). Cardinal here sets up a model of the female self as a collective of female identities--past, present and future--who live and grow together, who lend support to the more vulnerable characters, and learn to tolerate--even embrace and love--those more abrasive. This is a female self in a continual state of becoming, retaining its different identities, even as it evolves through them.

Significantly, the woman in Cardinal's autobiographical narrative is not given a name. She is the "she" and "I" who, as Cardinal notes, are as close to her as a sister. By not naming the woman who was, and continues to be an important part of her internal sisterhood, Cardinal opens her text up to the larger community of women, enabling others also to identify with the struggling and evolving woman in the narrative, and relate to her "as if she were [their] own sister" as well (Cardinal 248). Without a name, this character becomes a sort of "everywoman"--she is the woman Cardinal once was, but she is also the prototype of every woman who has experienced similar traumas, or has struggled with related issues. An identification on the part of the reader is encouraged.

Rita Felski comments that such a narrative strategy--the ambiguity of proper names--is typical of the life-writing of many feminist writers (95). Such texts (among which she includes Cardinal's), often contain "ambiguous or contradictory signals which problematize rather than confirm the distinction between autobiography and fiction" (92). According to Felski, feminist life writers tend towards this fictionalization of their own experience as a means of fostering a female community through the processes of recognition and identification. "On the one hand," she writes,

> the autobiographical status of the text is important in guaranteeing its truthfulness as the depiction of the life, and more important, the inner feelings of the particular individual. On the other, it is the *representative* aspects of experience, rather than those that mark the protagonist/narrator as unique, which are emphasized in relation to a notion of a communal female identity. (95)

The Words to Say It, as such a text, not only tells an individual story, but engages in a social practice of communal identity-building by giving voice to the unwritten stories of many women. It is highly conscious of its readers, and actively seeks out a connection with them. As such, it functions as an illocutionary act: going beyond a purely referential use of language, in order actively to *do something* with its words.

Cardinal's text functions in an illocutionary manner in another respect as well. Working at the social level, participating in a feminist social praxis, this text also does things, in an illocutionary sense, at the individual reading level. Not only does it encourage its reader to empathize and identify *with* the protagonist, but, as mentioned above, it also hails its reader into a position of affirming and nurturing response *to* that protagonist. The individual reader, thus, is doubly interpellated. This multiple positioning of the reader, I suggest, creates an interesting dynamic within the individual reader, one which enables the reader to experience vicariously, and in a way which goes beyond mere empathy, a process of healing which parallels Cardinal's own.

Phil Powrie asks an important question: "why does *Les Mots pour le dire* make such compelling reading?" ("Reading" 163). As he points out, Cardinal has published numerous other novels, but it is this text which has become best known, has attracted the greatest critical response, and, in large part also due to its English translation, has reached the widest audience. Why? Powrie suggests that the strong appeal of this particular text stems from the fact that it "works as a map of/for the unconscious. It maps out the principal operations of the Oedipal scenario whose replaying is cathartic and pleasurable" ("Reading" 163). In other words, the text speaks to the unconscious of its readers, eliciting powerful responses and instigating a drama of psychic struggle and resolution which parallels that experienced by the protagonist herself. The narrative gains a hold on the reader, he suggests, in a way that goes beyond simple identification with the narrator or protagonist ("Reading" 174).

I would agree with Powrie that there is indeed something in the way this narrative is structured which makes it particularly compelling. Whereas Powrie takes a strongly psychoanalytic tack, however, focusing on the way the text's polarized depiction of the mother functions as a trigger for unconscious processes in the reader, I would like to approach the issue from a slightly different, more narrative-oriented, point of view. This powerful reading effect can also be explained, I suggest, as an outcome of the doubled position of the implied reader.

In reducing the specificity of the protagonist's experiences, by shifting the autobiographical material into the realm of fiction, and in purposely refraining from mention of the protagonist's name, *The Words to Say It* invites an identification with its main character. The reader is encouraged to place herself (for such identification is probably easiest for women to make) in the position of the unnamed "I" of the text. At the same time, the text very overtly hails the reader into a different position–that of the nurturing other who, like the analyst and the husband, stands beside that suffering and emerging woman, assuming the role of healing listener and confidante. In simultaneously assuming both implied reading positions, the reader experiences a splitting of the self which reflects that experienced by the protagonist in the narrative. In discovering a relationship between these two reading selves, the reader enters into a process which mirrors the dynamics of Cardinal's own healing experience.

In *The Words to Say It*, healing comes about when Cardinal begins to function as nurturer to herself. At first, she is wholly dependent upon her analyst, leaning on him for support and direction. In the later stages of her analysis, however, Cardinal begins to take on the role of analyst for herself. Placing some distance between herself and the madwoman, she begins to establish a healing relationship with her: "...we resemble each other, we love each other, we live happily together" (270). In the process of making peace with the her, Cardinal also comes to discover other parts of herself which had been obscured by the madwoman's presence. Engaging in a salvage operation, Cardinal rediscovers the frightened girl still hiding within her, and retrospectively mothers that child in a way her own mother wasn't able to. She writes, "...I discovered the little girl in all her moods: unhappy, infatuated and terrified...I relived the moments with her, I became her, I felt her fear" (175). With this breakthrough, in discovering her own capacity for self-nurture, Cardinal is able to find some respite from her long-standing quest for external mother-love and to stand on her own. Resolution--both narrative and psychological--comes when Marie stands in the graveyard, saying goodbye to her dead mother. With the words, "I love you," she simultaneously embraces and lets go of her mother (292); she symbolically buries her mother at that moment, but also makes room for a resurrection of the maternal within herself.[4]

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[4] As I argue in the concluding chapter, however, despite the emotional resolution which takes place at the gravesite, there still persist in the text traces of an ongoing yearning for ideal maternal love. The sense of plenitude hinted at in the maternal Algerian garden of her youth ("The only time I was in perfect harmony with my mother was when we took a turn in the gardens" (83)) is never entirely recaptured, even at the end of the narrative.

Narrative Identity

In *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat,* neuropsychologist Oliver Sacks tells the story of Mr. Thompson. Suffering a severe case of amnesia due to Korsakov's syndrome, Mr. Thompson finds himself continually having to fill in the gaps opened up by memory loss. He does this by telling stories--reinventing himself and his world, literally moment by moment.

> He remembered nothing for more than a few seconds. He was continually disoriented. Abysses of amnesia continually opened beneath him, but he would bridge them, nimbly, by fluent confabulations and fictions of all kinds. For him they were not fictions, but how he suddenly saw, or interpreted, the world. Its radical flux and incoherence could not be tolerated, acknowledged, for an instant--there was, instead, this strange, delirious, quasi-coherence, as Mr. Thompson, with his ceaseless, unconscious, quick-fire inventions continually improvised a world around him... (104)

This case study, Sacks reflects, tells us something important about the nature of identity. Mr. Thompson's process of narrative self-construction, engaged in hundreds of times a day, he suggests, is an extreme version of how we all make sense of ourselves and our place in the world: "We have, each of us, a life-story, an inner narrative--whose continuity, whose sense, *is* our lives. It might be said that each of us constructs and lives, a 'narrative', and that this narrative *is* us, our identities" (105).

This relationship between narrative and human identity has become a subject of increasing interest in recent years. Stories are powerful and integral to our sense of who we are. In light of this, numerous thinkers in the humanities and social sciences are introducing the word "narrative" into their theoretical vocabulary and rethinking established notions of self and subjectivity. "As anyone aware of the current intellectual scene has noticed," remarks Martin Kreiswirth in his essay, "Tell me a Story: The Narrativist Turn in the Human Sciences,"

> there has recently been a virtual explosion of interest in narrative and in theorizing about narrative; and it has been detonated from a remarkable diversity of sites, both within and beyond the walls of academia. (61)

Psychotherapists, for the most part, have long recognized this intimacy between narrative and human identity, and hence have always given serious attention to the "tellings" emerging in the consultation room. And as will be seen in Chapter 5, some psychotherapists--particularly those with psychoanalytic leanings--have recast their entire practice in terms of narrative: respecting their clients as authoritative narrators of their own experience, and viewing their own therapeutic role as that of facilitator of flexibility and creativity in these clients' sometimes just emerging skills of self-narration.

It has only been more recently, however, that this interest in narrative has made the leap from the clinic into the world of academic psychology. In their parallel efforts to understand human behaviour, these psychologists too are beginning to discover in narrative an efficacious explanatory framework. Exploring what Theodore Sarbin calls "the storied nature of human conduct," they look at ways in which narrative figures in human action and social interaction.

In the humanities, where the tradition of literary thinking goes much deeper, and where narrative is not a such a new idea, there has nevertheless also been a new upsurgence of interest, particularly among those concerned with the areas of history and subjectivity. Countless books have been written by philosophers and literary theorists, from a whole plethora of critical positions (structuralist, poststructuralist, marxist, feminist and postcolonial, to name a few) about the status of the discursive "subject".[1] Many of these theorists have incorporated narrativity into their theories, sometimes to discuss the construction of various subjectivities, and sometimes to deconstruct those very subjects. There have, however, been other contemporary thinkers–most notably the hermeneutic philosophers–who have placed narrative at the center of their theories of subjectivity. While sharing with the narrative psychologists an interest in the role of narrative in the day-to-day experience and expression of selfhood, these philosophers, steeped as they are in this theoretical debate over the subject, take the further, and in comparison to the psychologists, more radical, step of suggesting that more than simply providing an apt metaphor or a useful analogy in the explanation of selfhood, narrative is indeed, as Sacks asserts, fundamental to the very constitution and configuration of subjectivity itself. And by contrast, while sharing with their colleagues in the humanities the assumption of the subject's embeddedness in language (a concept implicit to the very notion of "subject"), they also take the step of salvaging, or at least theoretically reinvoking, through narrative, some notion of "self."

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[1] See Paul Smith's *Discerning the Subject* and Kaja Silverman's *The Subject of Semiotics for* an overview and history of the "subject" in literary and philosophical theory.

In his discussion of this narrative turn in the human sciences, Kreiswirth also pauses to ask, "Why? Why narrative? And more particularly, why narrative now?" (61). These are productive questions, for in seeking answers to them one is led to the heart of what it is about narrative in particular, as opposed to other available models, that is distinctive and makes it compelling as an alternative to established approaches to issues of self and subjectivity. Kreiswirth ventures his own answer, suggesting that this trend can be seen as

> a response to (or compensation for) our current climate of anti-foundationalism, poststructuralism, and/or postmodernism–a response, that is, to the breakdown of transcendental truth-claims, to various overturnings or assaults on formerly hegemonic logico-deductive and patriarchal models of reason and knowledge. (63)

His speculation is insightful, and describes with accuracy, I think, the trend as it emerges in the humanities, particularly among the hermeneutic thinkers I refer to above. In the social sciences, however, there would appear to be other factors at work, and a different set of disciplinary circumstances being reacted to. I will pursue this further; first, however, I will take a closer look at some of the key figures in this multidisciplinary shift towards narrative, returning to this question "why" at appropriate moments along the way.

After providing a brief history and overview of the emergence of narrative in the field of psychology, I will examine some of the recent work of the hermeneutic philosophers who have given special attention to this question of narrative and identity. Of particular interest in this regard are the ways in which their theorizations of the narrative structure of identity imply and pursue also questions of the ethical positioning of such a self–questions of direct relevance to the collection of autobiographies looked at in this study. Following this, I will revisit a topic I have already introduced elsewhere: the role of the reader. In this context the question will be "What is the role of the reader, or narratee, in the construction and maintenance of narrative subjectivity and selfhood?"

The Storied Nature of Human Conduct: Narrative Psychology

One of the first psychologists to send out a call for the narrative investigation of human behaviour was cognitivist Jerome Bruner.[2] In his book, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds,* published in 1986, Bruner argues that it is through story-telling, rather than through logical argument or formulaic expression, that we deal with–and more importantly–give meaning to our experience. Bruner distinguishes between "paradigmatic" (associated with abstraction and scientific logic) and "narrative" ways of knowing, explaining that they are "two modes of cognitive functioning, two modes of thought, each providing distinctive ways of ordering experience, of constructing reality," which "(though complementary) are irreducible to one another" (11). Working within a discipline which has privileged the one mode over the other, Bruner sets out to correct the imbalance, reasserting narrative as a crucial starting point for any significant understanding of individual and interpersonal psychology. "While the paradigmatic mode is best for for making sense according to principles that abstract from context," clarifies Kevin Murray in a discussion of Bruner,

> narrative understanding carries the weight of context, which therefore makes it a better medium for relating human experience and the

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[2] Bruner was a primary catalyst for psychology's recent surge of interest in narrative; however, as Donald Pocklinghorne points out in his book *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*, the interest in language and narrative is not entirely new to the discipline. Though in recent decades psychology has worked almost exclusively within the purview of positivism, producing research primarily experimental and empirical in nature, there had been some early interest in the function of language in individual psychology prior to 1950. Pocklinghorne cites, amongst others, the work of Murray and Allport, Charlotte Buhler, John Dollard and George Herbert Mead (101-105).

contradictions that that entails. According to Bruner's argument, therefore, encapsulating experience in the form of a story enables it to make sense in the interpersonal sphere (178).

In a later book, *Acts of Meaning,* Bruner underscores this assertion that narrative is key to understanding human experience. Advocating what he terms "cultural psychology," an approach which would align psychology as much with the humanities as with the sciences, and in which psychologists would engage in cultural and historical interpretation as well as in scientific explanation, he draws special attention to the genre of the folk-narrative--the everyday stories people tell about themselves--as an especially fruitful source of psychological knowledge.

Theodore Sarbin, a social psychologist, is another important spokesperson for the narrative approach. In the same year that Bruner published *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds,* Sarbin published *Narrative Psychology: The Storied Nature of Human Conduct,* a collection of essays which theorize about and apply the narrative model to a variety of issues pertinent to the discipline. In his own seminal essay "The Narrative as a Root Metaphor for Psychology" he argues, in a vein similar to Bruner, that psychology (particularly social psychology) requires explanatory models which are able to address the contextualized and historical nature of human experience. By adopting narrative, as opposed to the machine, as a "root metaphor" (a term he borrows from Stephen Pepper), he argues, psychologists will better be able "to provide meaning to the often nonsystematic encounters and interactions experienced in everyday life" (19).

The essays in Sarbin's collection further theorize about the narrative approach, but also demonstrate what such a psychology might look like. Sarbin himself, for example, concludes his essay by providing a brief analysis of the phenomenon of self-deception. Rather than explaining it in terms of repression and dissociation (moves typically made, he says, by psychologists operating from a more mechanistic world view), Sarbin reframes self-deception in terms of narrative competence, describing it instead as an individual's overinvolvement in his own "self-story," accompanied by a failure adequately to negotiate this story with the stories of others around him. Elsewhere in the volume, Karl Scheibe exemplifies the narrative approach by drawing upon the literary genre of the adventure narrative to analyse the thrill-seeking behavior associated with gambling and sport. Ernest Keen takes the phenomenon of paranoia, and rearticulates it as a problem of excessively polarized self-emplotment. And in a slightly different vein, Kenneth Gergen and Mary Gergen, and Misia Landau, turn the narrative spotlight back on science itself in their examinations of, respectively, the narrativity of psychological theories of child development, and the implicit hero narrative at play in the formation of a theory of evolution.[3]

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[3] Karl E. Scheibe's "Self-Narratives and Adventure," Ernest Keen's "Paranoia and Cataclysmic Narratives," Kenneth Gergen and Mary Gergen's "Narrative Form and the Construction of Psychological Science" and Misia Landau's "Trespassing in Scientific Narrative: Grafton Elliot Smith and the Temple of Doom" can all be found in Sarbin's *Narrative Psychology*.

Donald Pocklinghorne is another voice in the field of psychology calling for a narrative approach to the study of human behavior. Taking a broad, interdisciplinary look at the issue in his book *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*, in which he brings together work done on narrative in the fields of linguistics, history, literary criticism and philosophy, Pocklinghorne concludes, in agreement with Bruner and Sarbin, that narrative is integral to human meaning-making activity, and hence a psychology which fails to address this narrativity of experience is inadequate and incomplete. Eloquently summing up his central argument he writes:

> narrative is a scheme by means of which human beings give meaning to their experience of temporality and personal actions. Narrative meaning functions to give form to the understanding of a purpose to life and to join everyday actions and events into episodic units. It provides a framework for understanding the past events of one's life and for planning future actions. It is the primary scheme by means of which human existence is rendered meaningful. Thus, the study of human beings by the human sciences needs to focus on the realm of meaning in general, and on narrative meaning in particular. (11)

When asked the questions, "Why narrative?" and "Why now?", the answer coming from these psychologists would seem to be quite clear and quite different from the one Krieswirth puts forward. Rather than embracing narrative and other literary modes of representing of human behavior in reaction to postmodernism, these psychologists appear instead to be chafing under, and theorizing against, the constraints of positivism. For psychologists, the adoption of narrative functions as part of a broader "paradigm shift" within the social sciences: a move away from positivism and empiricism into more language-sensitive, meaning-oriented ways of investigating human behavior.[4]

This discontent with positivism makes itself heard in the various prefaces and introductions to the books mentioned above. Theodore Sarbin describes how he became "disillusioned with the outcomes of social psychological research and theorizing carried out under the postulates of positivism....Clearly, mechanical, spatial, and energy metaphors--the customary sources of dimensions for those who were committed to making social psychology a science--were worn out, no longer capable of generating interesting concepts" ("Introduction" ix). Pocklinghorne expresses a similar frustration, commenting in his preface that an important impetus for his own book came from "an unresolved conflict between [his] work as an academic researcher on the one hand and as a practicing psychotherapist on the other" (ix). Elaborating further he writes,

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[4] This term is borrowed from Thomas Kuhn who argues, in his influential book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, that rather than moving forward as a progressive and steady accumulation of knowledge, science proceeds as a series of intellectual and methodological revolutions--paradigm shifts--which change the questions asked and alter the entire context within which science is done. Regarding what I've called a "paradigm shift" in the social sciences, though the shift in thinking is of paradigmatic proportions, the actual shift in numbers adopting the new ideas is minor--currently, most of the discipline is carrying on with the "normal science" of positivism.

> I find our traditional research model, adopted from the natural sciences, is limited when applied in the study of human beings. I do not believe that the solutions to human problems will come from developing even more sophisticated and creative applications of the natural science model..." (x)

Kenneth Gergen and Mary Gergen, social psychologists who take an overtly social constructionist position in their work, also reveal a disenchantment with the disciplinary status quo.[5] Situating their work as part of a "post-empiricist phase" of science (22-24), and taking a more linguistic stance than the others, they draw upon poststructuralist theories in the humanities to assert that "contemporary thinking about the nature of reference greatly weakens the link between theory and object, and opens up consideration of the ways in which the construction of scientific theories is governed by conventions of discourse" (25).

This shift towards language and literature is even more pronounced in John Shotter and Kenneth Gergen's *Texts of Identity*, a collection of social constructionist essays which critique, rethink, and even deconstruct (in terms of text) received psychological notions of self.[6] Though not all of these researchers explicitly adopt narrative as a framework, they nevertheless together succeed in pinpointing more specifically the philosophical and scientific specter which haunts and informs the work of the narrative psychologists. In their introduction to the volume, Shotter and Gergen note that

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[5] Social constructionist psychologists hold that identity and human action are constructs which emerge through social interaction and intersubjective discourse. Hence, language (and its vicissitudes) plays a key role in the psychology of self. See Kenneth Gergen's "The Social Constructionist Movement in Modern Psychology," and Kenneth Bruffee's "Social Construction, Language, and the Authority of Knowledge: A Bibliographic Essay" for summaries of this approach.

[6] This impulse can be seen in many of the essay titles, for example, Rom Harre's "Language Games and the Texts of Identity" and Edward Sampson's "The Deconstruction of the Self."

> To be concerned with the comparison and assessment of texts of identity in the modern Western world is to be engaged in a struggle with a dominant text: the centrality and sovereignty of the individual, and the problems to which it gives rise. And this is the central point of the volume: for in the process of critique, the boundaries of our current modes of being are softened, and the intelligibilities for possible new forms of personhood are revealed. (ix)

It seems somewhat ironic that just as these psychologists begin to turn to the humanities for metaphors and (in some cases) draw upon poststructuralist theories in an attempt to destabilize established scientific models of self, philosophers and other thinkers already within the humanities are moving in the opposite direction, seeking not to destabilize, but to restabilize (particularly regarding ethical questions) the human subject. Whereas these social psychologists see narrative as a postmodern (or post-empiricist) tool, a means by which to deconstruct the positivist self, philosophers, particularly the hermeneutic philosophers, see in narrative a means of reconfiguring--and restoring a renewed sense of "self" to--the fragmented subject of postmodernism.

What is particularly useful for this study in the psychologists' distinctive approach to narrative and identity is their emphasis upon the dialogic or intersubjective character of the narrating/narrated self. Reacting as they are to "the centrality and sovereignty of the individual, and the problems to which it gives rise" (Shotter and Gergen ix),[7] their studies tend to pay special attention to the communal and negotiated character of selfhood and highlight the important role played by the reading and conversational other in the construction and maintenance of narrative subjectivity.

Narrative Identity

If the psychotherapists are primarily interested in using narrative as a practical schema for processes of healing, and the psychologists are concerned with its use as an effective model for explaining human behavior, then the hermeneutic philosophers adopt narrative for the purpose of understanding the dynamics of human identity itself. And further, narrative provides for these thinkers a basis upon which to theorize not only the subject's embeddedness in language (something that other contemporary philosophers also assert) but also the process by which there emerges from this language-saturated subject an ethical self.

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[7] Clifford Geertz provides an apt summary of this Western conception of self in his description of it as a "bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe. a dynamic centre of awareness, emotion, judgement and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against its social and natural background" (59).

Hermeneutics, historically, has always concerned itself with the interpretation of texts. Originally associated primarily with Biblical exegesis, contemporary hermeneutics has expanded its horizon to the investigation of other sorts of texts, and has redefined itself more generally as an interpretive methodology within the human sciences. Applying "the hermeneutic circle" to texts of history, autobiography and literature, contemporary hermeneutic philosophers strive not only to elucidate these texts, but also to understand the very one who holds these texts in hand. As Wilhelm Dilthey, the founder of modern hermeneutics, puts it,

> Understanding presupposes experience and experience only becomes knowledge of life if understanding leads us from the narrowness and subjectivity of experience to the whole and the general. Moreover, the understanding of an individual personality, to be complete, requires systematic knowledge, while systematic knowledge is equally dependent on the vivid grasping of the individual person....[I]n the human studies everything from the process of understanding onwards is determined by the relationship of *mutual dependence.* (187-188)

Hence for Dilthey, as for its later adherents, hermeneutics is all about interpretively understanding (rather than scientifically explaining) what he elsewhere calls "the connectedness of life" (211).[8]

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[8] The distinction between explanation and understanding is important and much debated in hermeneutics. Generally speaking, however, explanation can be defined as the methodology used

Paul Ricoeur is a central figure in twentieth-century hermeneutics. Adopting in his philosophical work the part/whole dialectic which defines the hermeneutic methodology, Ricoeur, along with Dilthey, also stresses the textual detour necessary to any understanding of life and self: "there is no self-understanding," he writes, "which is not *mediated* by signs, symbols and texts" ("On Interpretation" 191). Multidisciplinary in scope, and prodigious in output, Ricoeur has addressed topics as diverse as the symbolism of evil, the function of metaphor and the philosophical import of Freudian psychoanalysis. His most recent work, however, has focused on the question of human identity and the role of textuality in general, and narrative in particular, in the configuration of self.

In what is probably his best known work, *Time and Narrative,* Ricoeur lays out the groundwork for his later studies in narrative[41] identity. In the first volume of this lengthy study he examines the question of time–in particular the time of human experience–and its relationship to narrative. Ricoeur argues that there is an intimate reciprocity between the two: "time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence" (Vol I 52). Narrative, in other words, is the means by which we transform what he terms "cosmological time" into

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in the natural sciences; it is an approach which aims to provide objectivity and epistemological closure through the use of mechanistic, naturalistic or causal descriptions. Understanding, on the other hand, is the methodology Dilthey argued was most appropriate for the human sciences. Understanding involves interpretation, implies reflective participation on the part of the exegete, and entails an ongoing process of hermeneutic interpretation and reinterpretation.

something lived and experienced; it is how we make time our own. In Volume II, Ricoeur examines the relationship between historical and fictional modes of narration and finally, in his third volume, and in characteristically hermeneutic style, Ricoeur brings the whole discussion back to the individual within history, investigating the function of narrative (both historical and fictional) in the constitution of identity.

In this theoretical development of what he terms "narrative identity," and indeed in all of his work on subjectivity, Ricoeur demonstrates a firm commitment to the understanding of lived human experience. His philosophical speculations, though complex and at times ponderous in their thoroughness, always seek to stay true to the immediacy of life, and address the deeply held convictions we have about the world and ourselves. G. B. Madison, also a hermeneutic philosopher, puts this down to the fact that Ricoeur brings into his hermeneutics also elements of phenomenology.

> Ricoeur's approach to subjectivity has been both *phenomenological* and *hermeneutical*–phenomenological, in that it seeks to clarify through reflective analysis that which is immediately and indubitably given to consciousness: the fact of the subject's own existence, the "mineness" characteristic of experience; hermeneutical, in that this reflective analysis is not descriptive in an intuitive or introspective way but is indirect and interpretive... (90)

As a hermeneut, Ricoeur explores the discursive "subject" of language and linguistics, and examines the ways in which subjectivity is necessarily indirect and mediated. Unlike many of his poststructuralist colleagues, however, he does so in a spirit of affirmation, rather than suspicion.[9] Instead of dismissing commonplace experiences of whole and unified selfhood as products of ideological delusion or false consciousness, Ricoeur respects and, with his phenomenological bent, gives intellectual credence to such lived experience. With his goal of understanding, with a hermeneutical rigour, the human experience of identity, Ricoeur strives to combine, as he himself puts it, "analytical precision with ontological testimony" ("On Interpretation" 196).

Identity, Ricoeur suggests, is fundamentally narrative in structure, emerging through the process of telling stories. As he argues in *Time and Narrative* and in subsequent publications, it stands as the meeting ground for history and fiction–the place where these two narrative modes link up and find integration. "Just why is the act of telling so close to the heart of our experience?" he asks.

> Perhaps it is because our own existence cannot be separated from the account we can give of ourselves. It is in telling our own stories that we give ourselves an identity. We recognize ourselves in the stories we tell about ourselves. ("History" 214)

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[9] In his book *Freud and Philosophy*, Ricoeur describes what he terms the "hermeneutics of suspicion": the doubting, negative hermeneutics of thinkers such as Nietzsche, Marx and Freud, who approach interpretation with a presumption of false consciousness.

Unlike approaches to identity which seek to posit an unchanging essence, or some sort of fixed bedrock of sameness, Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity is dynamic: it is able to incorporate flux and change within a overall framework of continuity and cohesion. Narrative identity implies a continual figuration and refiguration of the self--an ongoing process of intertextual self-interpretation:

> The subject then appears both as a reader and the writer of his own life....As the literary analysis of autobiography confirms, the story of a life continues to be refigured by all the truthful or fictive stories a subject tells about himself or herself. This refiguration makes this life itself a cloth woven of stories told. (*Time and Narrative,* vol 3. 246)

Anthony Paul Kerby, in his book *Narrative and the Self,* also stresses the centrality of narrative in the constitution of identity. In this book he sets up "a model of the human subject that takes acts of *self-narration* not only as descriptive of the self but, more importantly, as *fundamental to the emergence and reality of that subject*" (4). Using Ricoeur's work (with its combination of phenomenology and hermeneutics) as a basis for his own, Kerby draws also upon semiotics to tease out the mechanics of this process by which, as Ricoeur puts it, the "subject...appears both as a reader and the writer of his own life" (*Time and Narrative,* vol 3. 246).

Kerby borrows from Kaja Silverman in his development of a tripartite model of the narrating human subject.[10] When a person tells or writes an autobiographical story, he explains, he or she becomes a "speaking subject," a material agent of discourse. This act of expression then sets up a "subject of speech," the character within the narrative, signified by the personal pronoun, I. The triangle is completed by the "spoken subject," the figure which emerges as a result of an empathetic linkage between the listener-reader and the subject of speech. "What then makes this narrative personally historical or autobiographical," writes Kerby, "is that I correlatively become the spoken subject of the narrative--just as a spectator might identify with some character in a play or film" (105). If the structure of subjectivity, according to Kerby's model, has three positions, the dynamics of this process of narrative subjectivity better resembles a circle, one which involves three distinct phases: spoken or written expression (when the speaking subject sets up a subject of speech), participation (where the subject of speech is appropriated by a listener or reader, producing the spoken subject), and interpretive desire (which motivates the spoken subject to re-enter the circle as a speaking subject). This third phase is what makes the circle a hermeneutic one; it is what disrupts the stasis of spoken subjectivity, and motivates the speaking subject into further narration. "When narrating one's past," Kerby comments, "it is often the case that first attempts are unsatisfactory: the recollections are seen as too sketchy or perhaps as fabrications; there is a rejection of the implied subject (of speech) as being or properly representing oneself" (106). Kerby also describes this impetus toward further narration, what he calls "desire," as "a form of *vouloir dire* (a wanting to say, to be, to do)" (107).

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[10] Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics.*

Hence, this semiotic triangle becomes a hermeneutic circle, an ongoing process of interpretive self-narration and renarration. Although he highlights in his model the play of signification in the process of subject construction, Kerby does not overlook the presence of the embodied, experiencing person. It is here that he, like Ricoeur, maintains ties with phenomenology, and distinguishes his own approach to subjectivity from those of other contemporary theorists. "For structuralism,...semiotics, and narrative theory (as applied to literature)," he remarks, "it is the subject of speech that has been especially emphasized."

> Indeed, it is here that the stories we tell of ourselves appear in the public arena, and hence where the linguistic subject is constituted. But rather than leave this subject of speech floating in linguistic space...the above model attempts to integrate the body back into the equation, not of course as the positivist material body of science but as the speaking-feeling embodied subject (the person) (107).

In Kerby's model, there are two primary means by which the body is integrated with signification: participation and implication. Through the participatory acts of expression and appropriation, the linguistic subject of speech is connected, respectively, to the embodied speaking and spoken subjects. A second type of linkage is established by means of implication; that is, when a listener or reader ascribes to the (embodied) speaking subject the characteristics of the textually implied author. Hence, as Kerby explains, the body surfaces in his model as both a "site of narration" and a "site of ascription," and "it is here," he comments, "that our commonsense notions of ourselves as embodied subjects are satisfied" (107).

Kerby's dissection of the semiotics of narrative subjectivity serves to underscore the very thing that, for Ricoeur, makes the notion of narrative identity such a powerful model: its ability to explain both continuity and change in the experience of self and its attention to the concrete situatedness of the embodied person. And, as Kerby suggests, this emphasis upon embodiment, and upon the interpretive moment which provides the impulse towards further narration (the *vouloir dire)*, is what distinguishes this model from other descriptions of subjectivity, and makes it firmly hermeneutical. This hermeneutic model of narrative identity construction also sets itself apart from other theories of the subject, particularly those with poststructuralist leanings, in that it is able to address questions of agency and responsibility. In that moment between narration and re-narration, during that pause of interpretive self-reflection, a space is opened up: an ethical space in which judgement is brought to bear on the whole process and questions such as "Who am I?" and "Who shall I be?" are raised. The linguistic subject becomes also an embodied ethical subject.

Charles Taylor is a philosopher who emphasizes this ethical dimension implicit to narrative identity. "To know who you are," he argues in his book, *Sources of the Self*, "is to be oriented in moral space, a space in which questions arise about what is good or bad, what is worth doing and what is not, what has meaning and importance for you and what is trivial and secondary" (28). If orientation to the good is a necessary condition of human identity, Taylor adds, so is narrative:

> Now we see that this sense of the good has to be woven into my understanding of my life as an unfolding story. But this is to state another basic condition of making sense of ourselves, that we grasp our lives in a *narrative*. (47)[11]

Taylor's examination of the history of the self, and his emphasis in that analysis upon the latent aspirations towards ethical meaning which inform our self-narrations, is part of a larger response to what he perceives as "the malaise of modernity."[12] In *Sources of the Self*, Taylor diagnoses contemporary Western culture as experiencing a sort of identity crisis: individualism has weakened social ties and estranged people from their communities, instrumental reason has demythologized the world and severed connections to nature, and industrialtechnological structures have induced social passivity and political apathy. What has ensued, he argues, is a pervasive loss of meaning and a "stifling of the spirit" (*Sources* 520). In short, we are currently experiencing a crisis of ethical articulacy. "As our public traditions of family, ecology, even polis are undermined or swept away, we need new languages of personal resonance to make crucial human goods alive for us again" (*Sources* 513).

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[11] Alasdair MacIntyre makes a similar point in his book, *After Virtue*: "To be the subject of a narrative that runs from one's birth to one's death is...to be accountable for the actions and experiences which compose a narratable life" (217).

[12] This is the title of a shorter work by Taylor, a set of lectures which distill many of the ideas presented in the more lengthy and scholarly *Sources of the Self*.

If Taylor diagnoses a crisis of ethical articulacy in twentieth-century society, Christopher Norris decries the failure of contemporary philosophy and critical theory to address the situation; postmodernist thinking, he argues, while intellectually challenging, is too often mute on the ethical front and silent in the face of questions of justice and human responsibility. In *Truth and the Ethics of Criticism,* Norris cites as an example the moral paralysis of poststructuralist theory when it comes to responding to revisionist histories of the Holocaust:

> If one asks how this attitude has taken such a hold among large sections of the present-day 'radical' intelligentsia then the answer is evident enough. It has come about through the lack of any reasoned or principled resistance among thinkers convinced--on post-structuralist grounds--that the subject is nothing more than a side-effect of 'discourse,' a nominal entity or mirage of the humanist imaginary. For what we are left with then is a range of multiple but always pre-constituted 'subject-positions', none of which affords the least prospect of exerting any independent effort of thought, any will to

> raise questions of truth or justice except in so far as those questions take rise from some in-place (purely strategic) conjunction of power/knowledge interests. (118-119)

This concern about the ethical paralysis of poststructuralism, Norris points out, is not solely his own but is increasingly being shared by others in intellectual circles. In the face of recent world events, even some of those considered vanguards of the movement are having second thoughts. "Seldom in the history of thought," he comments,

> ...can so much ingenious endeavour have yielded so little in the way of humane understanding or improved interpretive grasp. But there are heartening signs, in the recent work of thinkers like Kristeva and Said, that this orthodoxy is meeting a vigorous challenge from some of those once routinely enlisted in its name. (120)

Norris' own response to this contemporary ethical malaise is to suggest a reassessment of the beleaguered and largely abandoned tradition of enlightened critical and emancipatory thought and a recouping of some of its best elements. Only with some agreement about notions such as "truth" and "reason," he argues, can there be hope of any meaningful negotiation between competing truth-claims, and any effective response on the part of intellectuals to situations of injustice and oppression.

The theory of narrative identity, with its implicit emphasis upon the agentive and ethical dimensions of subjectivity, is another rejoinder to this contemporary situation. As well, it is particularly suited as a framework for addressing the issues of reader response emerging from the autobiographies of trauma and healing I'm looking at. Narrative assumes both a narrator and a narratee–it is not a solitary act–and as MacIntyre and Taylor suggest, the act of self-narration functions at the same time as an act of social accountability. The converse is true as well: if self-narration places the narrator in a position of responsibility, it also involves the solicitation of response–and responsibility–on the part of the narratee. It is in large part this very sense of mutual connection and answerability evoked by the narrative act that enables the narrator, through the spoken word, to become his or herself.[13] In thus situating the subject, the theory of narrative identity implies a challenge, and an alternative, to poststructuralism's alienated, decentered and morally dispersed subject, by suggesting how bonds of empathy and interlocution between people are indeed possible.

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[13] This question of the ethical dialogism implicit to narrative identity will be taken up further in Chapter 7, where I discuss Ricoeur's theory of *ipse*-identity, as laid out in his most recent book, *Oneself as Another.*

"I was searching inside myself for a word": Narration and Renarration in Donna Williams' *Nobody Nowhere* and *Somebody Somewhere*

Our lives are embedded in narrative. "We dream in narrative, daydream in narrative," writes literary critic Barbara Hardy, "remember, anticipate, hope, despair, [and] believe...by narrative" (5). Narrative provides us with a means of giving structure to our experience, and it is through the very process of narrating our lives that we become ourselves. As philosopher Paul Ricoeur puts it: "It is in telling our own stories that we give ourselves an identity. We recognize ourselves in the stories we tell about ourselves" ("History" 214).

The stories we tell about ourselves, and in which we recognize ourselves, derive in large part from the stories we hear or read, and adopt as our own. If we find ourselves locked into an oppressive or limiting narrative, reading can broaden our horizons, and lead us to an awareness of other possibilities. If we feel trapped by an outworn story--perhaps one not of our own making--writing, revising, and revisioning our personal narrative can be a creative and therapeutic experience. Such self-configuring reading and writing is an ongoing process, for as long as we continue to live, our stories--ourselves--are always texts-in-progress. Discovering and telling what Donald Spence terms the "narrative truth" of our existence is a life-long task and a process of continuous revision: editing the story to accommodate new bits of life-experience; tailoring it to adjust to present needs. It is a hermeneutic process of self-interpretation and reinterpretation, a process necessarily mediated by texts, for as Ricoeur reminds us, "there is no self-knowledge without some kind of detour through signs, symbols and cultural works" ("History" 213).

Donna Williams' two recent autobiographies provide a good example of a text-mediated "self-in-progress"--a therapeutic journey of self-narration and renarration. In her first book, *Nobody Nowhere*, Williams tells the story of the first twenty-four years of her life, describing her ambivalent relationships with others and her experiences of fragmented identity. Fueling the narrative are the questions, "Who am I?" and "Why am I like this?" "I had written it for myself," she explains, "and had wanted just to read it back and see my life consistently and see that my life had belonged to me" (188). Self-understanding, for Williams, emerges only after a process of explicit self-narration and self-reading. It is a fruitful process for Williams does, indeed, begin to find answers to her questions. Narrative closure and personal healing are brought about through a self-diagnosis of autism. Reinterpreting her past in light of this new word, Williams discovers a previously unrecognized coherence to her life, and finds the courage to step out of her isolation and into "the world."[1]

In her second autobiography, *Somebody Somewhere*, Williams narrates this story of her entry into the world, a process made all the more dramatic by the instant celebrity surrounding the publication of *Nobody Nowhere*. As well as picking up chronologically where the first book leaves off, Williams' second autobiography also destabilizes the narrative closure of the first text as it revisits and reinterprets some of the early experiences recorded there. A hermeneutic circle of interpretation and reinterpretation is established, in which Williams takes some of the material from the first book--rereading her own autobiography, as it were--and weaves it into the texture of the ongoing life-narrative.

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[1] For a brief history of autism as a distinct clinical diagnosis, see Sidonie Smith's "Taking it to the Limit One More Time: Autobiography and Autism."

Perhaps the most obvious, and most interesting interpretive shift involves Williams' relationship to the term "autism." "I was searching inside myself for a word," she writes in *Nobody Nowhere* (187). In this first book, the discovery of the word "autism" and her identification with it prove to be liberating for Williams--a recognition takes place, and a naming of self. In the second book, however, there is more ambivalence about the term. If the word "autism" is what provides narrative closure in the first book, it is also the very thing that evokes the need for further narration, and a second autobiography. With the publication of *Nobody Nowhere*, an autobiography explicitly identified in its subtitle as that "of an autistic," Williams' identity became synonymous, for her reading public, with autism. In *Somebody Somewhere*, Williams seeks to enlarge her identity beyond that diagnosis, and narrates what for her is the next step: "breaking free," as the subtitle indicates, "from the world of autism."

"to...see my life consistently"

At the age of twenty-five, having always felt out of place in, and at odds with, "the world," as she terms it, Donna Williams sits down to write her autobiography to find out why--to discover the elusive word which would explain her own life back to her.

> I began with the center of my world as far back as I could remember. The nights got longer as one page rolled into the next and I relived each moment, staring straight ahead and letting the words come from my fingers.
>
> I was searching inside myself for a word... (*Nobody* 187)

Nobody Nowhere depicts Donna Williams' struggle to make sense of a life of alienation and estrangement from others. After years of experiencing herself as a freak in the world of "normal" people, Williams begins to write down her story while at the same time poring over textbooks of psychiatry, seeking a clue to her own identity: "[I] searched desperately to find a sense of belonging within those pages that would give me a word to put to all of this" (187). In a conversion-like moment of revelation, Williams succeeds in finding that word--a forgotten word which provides for her an interpretive point of entry into her own life:

> Suddenly it jumped out at me from the page. It was the first time since my father had said it four years ago that I'd heard the word. 'Autism,' it read, 'not to be confused with schizophrenia.' My heart jumped, and I shook. Perhaps this was the answer or the beginning of finding one. (187)

Fearing madness, suspecting autism, she hands her manuscript to a psychiatrist with the words, "What kind of mad am I?" (Gzowski). The result of this act of self-narration and self-exposure is a confirmation and a diagnosis--a diagnosis which for Williams proves liberating. The word autism comes to be the key to her own story: it is the missing word that enables Williams to name her own experience, piece together a fragmented past, and eventually forge a connection to the world of others.

Flowing from her fingers in virtually automatic fashion, Williams' words take on a life and direction of their own. "It happened simply, easily," she says. "I didn't think I was writing, even. With pencil and paper, I let my mind wander.....What were these typographical symbols I filled my pages with? I didn't know, and I didn't try to find out. In submitting to the process, I felt satisfaction" (215-216).[2] These automatic words, dissociated for Donna at the time of writing from their meanings, function to draw her into and through a confusing and painful past--her own unnarrated story. Like the free associations of a client in psychotherapy, Donna's written words lead her to something needed for the task of healing--something forgotten, or previously overlooked. Self-narration, thus, leads her to the very source of her healing; the act of life-writing not only provides her (as it does Cardinal and Danica) with an opportunity to tell of her suffering and eventual healing, but it also becomes, in itself, an integral part of that process of healing.

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[2] This experience of confidence in, or as Elly Danica puts it, "faith in" the process, is something which figures prominently in all three of the autobiographies I'm examining.

Williams' initial relationship to her own written words is characteristic of all of her relationships up until that point: dissociated and estranged. Extemely sensitive to both physical and emotional stimuli, a condition she later attributes to her autism, Williams learns to protect herself by erecting an invisible wall between herself and others. Overwhelmed by the emotional demands of social interaction, she barricades herself with two constructed characters, and leaves to them the task of coping with that world for her. "Carol," charming and talkative, is the character turned on to function at parties and to keep everyone laughing. Carol is also the compliant one, who gets drawn into a series of abusive relationships. The other character is "Willie." Abrasive, aggressive and analytical, Willie is an embodiment of rationality and control; Carol's opposite in many ways, he is the one called upon to rescue her in particularly tough situations, and with his intellectual acuity, is able to perform and succeed at university. Behind these two faces on the world, however, lurks Donna--"the real me" (79), Williams says--safely protected, but profoundly isolated.

Instead of establishing relationships with other people, Donna forms attachments to objects. Retreating from the world of others, she creates her own, safer world, a world in which her heightened senses do not betray her, or leave her vulnerable. As a young child, Donna takes delight in the dancing lights and kaleidoscopic colours she finds around her. Fascinated by shiny bits of foil and colourful pieces of string, she learns not only how to enjoy but also how to immerse herself totally--lose herself--in that world of the senses. An early dream describes this sensory oblivion: "I was moving through white, with no objects, just white. Bright spots of fluffy color surrounded me everywhere. I passed through them, and they passed through me. It was the sort of thing that made me laugh" (3). Gazing at shiny trinkets (7), playing with someone's feathery hair (9), or staring at spots in the light after rubbing her eyes (3), all provide entry into that "magical world of nothingness" (3). Donna comes to identify these dancing spots of light and colour, "tiny creatures, almost transparent" which hang in the air directly above her, as "the wisps" (10):

> *The wisps surround me in my bed,*
> *They hover there for to protect me;*
> *For the wisps, they are my friends. (9)*

Companions for her in that magical world, bringers of pleasure and delight, the wisps also eventually come to mirror back to her a profound estrangement. Finding safety and security within her own world, Donna also experiences this private sphere as a lonely prison. This self-contained world serves to protect the extra-sensitve girl and woman, but it also succeeds in cutting Donna off from other people, and also, ultimately, from herself. She languishes behind an invisible barrier--in a "world under glass" (66)--striving to overcome the gulf lying between her world and "the world" of others.

In a prefatory note Williams writes, "This is a story of two battles, a battle to keep out 'the world' and a battle to join it. It tells of the battles within my own world and the battle lines, tactics used, and casualties of my private war against others." (1). The dilemma of this ambivalent relationship with others--seeking on the one hand to keep other people safely at arm's length, but yearning, on the other hand, to erase the intervening distance and forge a connection--is at the heart of Donna Williams' book. In her narrative Donna describes her attempts to address this situation. Taking the step of relating to others, but doing so only tentatively and indirectly, Donna is able, partially, to make her way into that elusive world of others.

Throughout her life, Donna's connection to others could only take place obliquely. Making contact through the mediation of objects, Donna is able to establish some important, albeit fragile, childhood relationships. Her grandmother, for instance, is experienced by the young girl as a composite of wrinkles, camphor and knitted things. To reach out to her grandmother, and evoke that early sense of security, Donna pokes her fingers through pieces of crocheted wool. "For me, the people I liked were their things..." (6). And with her grandfather, Donna is able to establish a relationship only through a shared language of "special names" for objects they played with. "Communication via objects was safe" (6). Through the indirectness of metonymic association, Donna, the girl, is able to establish a few human relationships. As long as there is no direct eye contact, and no direct naming, she is able to feel free and unthreatened.

These tentative, indirect relationships, limited as they are, nevertheless give Donna the hope that a more direct relationship might eventually be possible. In *Nobody Nowhere,* Williams describes an early experiment in self-representation: a personal collection of "bits and pieces." Having decided to move to England from Australia, Donna gathers up courage for the journey by symbolically gathering herself together in a collection of treasured objects. These objects she places in a tea-chest to take along with her:

> I piled in the bits of colored tinfoil, buttons, ribbons, sequins, and colored glass that had been with me all my life....The places, experiences, and people I had become attached to, my sense of security, and my ability to make sense of the relationships between things existed within these collections. I could lay everything out in categories and grasp the concept of order, consistency, and belonging despite my inner lack of it (163).

She keeps her personal treasures to herself, however, locked within the chest so that they would remain safe and untouched: "I lived far more in my things than I did in my body. Leaving them packed away, uncorrupted, meant that they were retrievable later when it would be safe yet again to get close to myself and my feelings" (164).

This autobiography of treasured objects functions as a tentative stepping stone into the self-disclosure of life-writing. Too vulnerable and fearful at that point to risk sharing her personal treasures with anyone else, Donna nevertheless fosters a hope that perhaps one day such a sharing might take place: "When I set out my bits and pieces, I could visually grasp the elusive sense of belonging I could never feel with people, and through this could give myself hope that it would one day be possible" (163). This hope becomes even more pronounced in the written autobiography. Like the collection in the tea-chest, Williams' autobiography is written as an explicit attempt "to see [her] life consistently" (188). But also, like the collection, the autobiography exceeds this stated aim by drawing Donna beyond herself--and out of her self-contained world--into reflection upon her ambivalent relationship to the world of others. Writing her narrative in physical isolation, in a "flat on the top floor all to [her]self" (186), Williams not only describes this very situation of isolation, but also takes the step of ameliorating that situation by symbolically reaching out, through the pages of her text, to "the world" in a gesture of reconciliation and relationship. Not quite ready at the time of writing to deal with "the world" head on, and in person, Williams takes the more indirect (and less threatening) route, in *Nobody Nowhere*, of relating and responding to an implied reader. Hence, the autobiographical text not only describes Donna Williams' desire to break free from her "mystical glass coffin" (10), but also begins to act on that desire.

"talking in poetry"

Part of the legacy of autism for Donna is a disabling disruption in everyday communication. As a child, she is quite literally misunderstood. Her words, though earnest and meaningful for herself, are dismissed as gibberish by those around her.

> I would walk about talking, trying to attract attention and going on and on about something in a very indirect way. My mother called my means of verbal communication 'wonking.' This was equivalent in definition, I suppose, to 'unintelligible, mindless babbling.' For me, this 'wonking' was my way of conversing and was certainly not mindless. It took an incredible degree of courage to seek out an audience and talk about something I was interested in. To me, this made me painfully vulnerable. I was expressing something about my own personality and identity. The fear it inspired would simply not have allowed me to express anything personal in any other way. (52)

For Donna, direct communication of feeling, of self, is next to impossible. Any expression of emotion has to take place in disguise. Or not at all. For situations in which the "wonkings" of her childhood were inappropriate, Donna develops an alternative strategy of emotional evasion: intellectualizing. Drawing upon Willie's competence in academic discourse, Donna learns "to become cold and clinical about topics [she] might feel something about" (52). Commenting on her (Willie's) Master's thesis, Williams writes,

> I had cut from it all richness of expression with the skill of a literary surgeon. There was not a personal element in it, except for a brief dedication. The animated extracts of information I had used to illuminate the text stood out as some perverse mockery of my complete inability to expose myself emotionally to a waiting audience. The thesis was as clinical and sterile as a surgeon's instrument cabinet. (153)

With her multiple personalities--the characters of Carol and, particularly, Willie--increasingly speaking for her, Donna armours herself against the world, and against her more vulnerable, feeling self. But even Willie and Carol are not able entirely to subdue that part of Donna which does, nevertheless, feel and crave connection with others. Such connection, she acknowledges, however, does not happen when there is no communication: "Deep down," she comments about herself, "Donna never learned to communicate. Anything that I felt in the present still had either to be denied or expressed in a form of conversation others called waffling, chattering, babbling, or 'wonking.' I called it 'talking in poetry'" (53).

In the autobiographies it is the newly emerging Donna who speaks and it is her voice, capable now of giving expression to feeling, which dominates the text. Nevertheless, remnants of her previous strategies of evasion can still be detected in these pages. Though clearly personal in content and revealing of some powerful emotions, Williams' text also displays a residue of this state of split subjectivity in the autobiographical dialectic of prose and poetry. There are places in the text where Williams falls into a distant, matter-of-fact discussion of emotional issues--echoing the analytic, detached tone of Willie's academic discourse. Nevertheless, the autobiography is able to get past this coldness and bear witness to a desire to connect. In *Nobody Nowhere*, the narrator reaches out to the reader, tentatively and often indirectly, in hope of establishing a connection. Woven into the fabric of the explicit life-narrative, between the lines of objective prose, there emerges a different thread--a more subtle one, not immediately observed. It is a quieter voice than that of the primary narrator. Periodically suspending the more analytic--sometimes even clinical-sounding--voice of the majority of the text, Williams introduces a second voice: a voice which, as she describes it, speaks in poetry.

Williams' autobiographical narrative is punctuated by short segments of poetry. Unannounced and uncontextualized, these poetic pieces form a subjective counterpoint to the more objective prose in which they are embedded. Like the misunderstood "wonkings" of her childhood, these poetic interludes appear to be a safe space in which Donna is able to express a more intimate, personal side of herself--a side which is intense with feeling. It is in poetic language, for instance, that she is able to give most poignant expression to her experience of fragmentedness:

Shattered dreams, broken glass,
Echoes of a shattered past,
Too many names strewn about,
The kind that one can live without.
They're the shadows here, within,
That tear apart personality. (35)

This image of shattered glass recurs in Williams' book, both in the narrative sections and in the poetry. She mentions at one point, with reference to her father's periodic outbursts of violence, that "regardless of what else he'd do, the most disturbing thing was the noise and the sound of smashing glass" (36). This distress makes itself felt in the poetry. It becomes clear, however, that Donna's most profound fear is also symbolic of a just as intense, but less articulate, desire: to break out of her isolating glass coffin and touch--and be touched by--the world.

Life behind glass. Living death made tolerable.
Pure fear of the one touching touch,
Which could smash the glass forever,
And send the dancer plummeting from her tightrope,
Into the knowing of the unknown.
Today it seemed the world was a scene
In a book of secrets from which we tore a page.
A touching touch shattered the glass between two worlds,

> *And the cold wind of uncertainty whistled a chill*
> *Through body and soul, entwined for the first time,*
> *Like vines wild and free.* (135)

It is in the poetic passages that Donna is able most directly to give voice to the intensity of her conflicting emotions: her terrifying fear of, but also hope for, connection and freedom. And it is through this poetry that she also implicitly and tentatively hails the reader: testing the reader's sensitivity (hoping the he or she will see more than mere "wonking"), and inviting this reader to respond with tact and understanding.

Like Cardinal in *The Words to Say It*, Williams hails the reader, but also teaches the reader how to respond to her text--to herself--by setting up models and anti-models of reading. It is a lesson in indirection. Recalling a time when she was a teenager, Williams describes her mother's reaction upon learning of some private writing she had been doing:

> Cuttingly my mother insisted that I show her what I'd written. I handed over my poems, and she mockingly read some of what I had written out loud, criticizing the grammar, the images I had used, and "its madness." "It's typical," she said, as though that summed up everything. Fortunately, in the evasiveness of my so-called "mad" writing, its meaning eluded her; and so, to my mind, it remained "uncontaminated" by "informed" criticism. (77)

Countering this example of intrusive and hostile reading, Williams, in her second book, *Somebody Somewhere,* describes a very different scene of reader response. With great trepidation, she gives her friend Tim a copy of the then unpublished *Nobody Nowhere:*

> Tim and I stood silently in the kitchen as I handed him a copy of the manuscript. He disappeared into his room to read it. I disappeared into the spare room and traced the pattern of the patchwork quilt upon my bed.
>
> I walked into Tim's bathroom and stood before the mirror. There was a gentle vulnerability and honesty in the face looking back. I could no longer see Carol within those eyes. There was no deadness, no manic smile, no head cocked cutely to the side, no "ideal child" photo pose. I saw me and it moved me. (*Somebody* 13)

When he finishes reading, Tim returns and quietly brings her tea. "*Tim had spent five years waiting for me to join him in his world,*" reflects Donna, in a brief memory fragment, "*Now he was trying to meet me in mine*" (14). Refraining from direct comment on her text, sensitive to Donna's own sensitivity, he responds instead with a symbolic gesture. Taking a box of chocolates, he begins, with Donna, to shape small bits and pieces from the colourful foil wrappers.

> Tim got a jar, scrubbed the label off, and brought it over to the bench where the sparkly bits were. One of his big hands swept the bench clean, and the sparkly pieces of him and me fell together into the glass jar. He put the lid

> on this world under glass and shook it. The bits of him and me danced around and touched each other. (14)

Here, as in the similar story of the husband's response in Cardinal's autobiography, reading is transformed into an act of loving.

The act of life-writing, and more importantly, the step of sharing that writing with another, marks for Donna a terrifying leap into "the world." It is a gesture of reconciliation, a truce in her "war with others." What she calls for in response is a similar leap of faith on the part of the reader: a willingness also to dare to venture, as does Tim, into the unknown territory of a new and perhaps frightening world: the world of autism. *Nobody Nowhere* implies and hails a reader who will look beyond the facades of Carol and Willie and find Donna. It seeks out a reader who, in reading Donna's poetry, will recognize the fear, but will also respond to the implicit desire for connection and meet her halfway.

"breaking free from the world of autism"

Nobody Nowhere seeks to educate its reader about autism, as well as solicit understanding and acceptance of autistics, including Donna Williams herself. In *Somebody Somewhere*, however, while continuing in her role of advocate, Williams also begins to express ambivalence about the term, recognizing some of the problems involved with living with a psychiatric label. If clinical diagnosis is the response overtly sought out and embraced immediately following her first venture into life writing, when Donna takes her text to the psychiatrist, cautiousness about stigmatizing labels, respect for the integrity of her unique experience of the world and acknowledgement of her "self" as distinct and separate from autism are the objectives of the second book.

Having through the act of self-narration discovered the word "autism," and with it a key to self-understanding, Williams goes on to use that key to reinterpret the memories depicted in *Nobody Nowhere.* Scenes from childhood are reread in light of the diagnosis, and re-narrated in terms of this new word. In *Somebody Somewhere,* however, Donna's initial euphoria upon discovery of the word dampens as she comes to learn that it cannot explain everything. Though it goes a long way in answering her question, "Why am I like this?", the word "autism," she realizes, is not able to answer her even more pressing question: "*Who* am I?" "Autism had had me in its cage for as long as I had ever known," she writes.

> Autism had been there before thought, so that my first thoughts were nothing more than automatic, mirrored repetitions of those of others. Autism had been there before sound so that my first words were the meaningless echo of the conversations of those around me. Autism had been there before words, so that ninety-nine percent of my verbal repertoire was a stored-up collection of literal dictionary definitions and stock phrases. Autism had been there before I'd ever known a want of my own, so that my first "wants" were copies of those seen in others (a lot of which came from

> TV). Autism had been there before I'd learned how to use my own muscles, so that every facial expression or pose was a cartoon reflection of those around me. Nothing was connected to self....I was in a state of total alienation. This, for me, was autism. (*Somebody* 5)

Williams' process of rereading her life in terms of autism hermeneutically brings her back to an interrogation of the interpretive word itself. In *Somebody Somewhere* Williams explores in light of her own experience some of the conflicting theories of autism and narrates scenes which expose commonly held stereotypes. This process of reinterpretation also triggers a new quest: a search for an answer to that lingering question, "Who am I?"

Somebody Somewhere is a narrative of self-salvaging. "My awakening to 'the world' became the dawning of my own inner integration," writes Williams. "I didn't need Willie and Carol anymore. I needed Donna. I said goodbye to the characters who had sustained me for so long and welcomed the me I wanted to know better" (10). Having broken her silence in the pages of *Nobody Nowhere,* Donna is set free to discover the "me" long eclipsed by autism. Having made initial contact with "the world" through her hailing of and trust in an implied reader, a gesture which does indeed lead her to emerge from her isolation and forge connections with real readers like Tim, Donna is emboldened to continue on this path of self-discovery, and to more fully become herself in relationship with other people. "I couldn't go forward with the old definitions. But to build new ones--*my* definitions--I would have to face the old ones and tell it like it was," she writes (*Somebody* 12). Re-narration continues, but now in conjunction with other people, whose overlapping memories she also solicits, and with the revised aim of nurturing a self which is affected by, but distinct from, autism.

This changed attitude is evident in the very structure of the text. Whereas in *Nobody Nowhere* the narrative is punctuated by segments of poetry, subtle *cris de coeur* from the silenced Donna, in *Somebody Somewhere* the text is interspersed with more direct and confident gestures of connection. There are self-exploratory letters written to a specific addressee: Dr. Marek, a psychologist. As well, there are italicized fragments of memory: reminiscences which carry the emotional tenor of the poetry in *Nobody Nowhere* but with a narrative cohesiveness which more closely links these passages with the surrounding text. If the split subjectivity of Williams' multiple personalities is reflected in the dualism of prose and poetry in *Nobody Nowhere,* the movement towards personality integration is structurally reflected in the more continuous text of *Somebody Somewhere.*

Integration also takes place in Donna's experience of the world. Initially compartmentalizing it into "my world" and "the world", an either/or dichotomy in which, she long assumes, sides must be chosen, Donna comes to discover and cultivate an intermediary place: one containing elements of both worlds. This place, this state of mind, which she calls "simply be," is a world in which Donna is able to relax and take pleasure in the unique perceptions her heightened sensitivity yields without at the same time losing touch with, or isolating herself from, the world of others. And it is a world she is sometimes able to share. "I pointed at the lights and the lines, tracing them, my hands sweeping through the air, cutting lines, my eyes speaking far more than my words," she writes, describing a time together with a friend (and her future husband) by the seaside.

> Ian pointed out the symmetry of everything in this same way. We spoke the same language.
>
> We both looked at the sparkles on the water, my fingers dancing out in front of me as though I were playing piano upon the air. Ian glanced quickly at me and smiled. I felt the wind and smelled the ocean on the air. Ian was a comrade who had come home after a long, long journey. I was speaking to him in a language that was mine and, I felt, had once somehow been his, too. It was the language of "simply being." (*Somebody* 211)

In reclaiming that part of herself which once revelled in the wisps and dancing colours, in learning to articulate and share the language of "simply being," Williams finds an answer to the question which has eluded her. "The most important thing I have learned is that AUTISM IS NOT ME," she boldly declares at the close of *Somebody Somewhere* (238). Through the sometimes circuitous process of negotiating her relationship to that word, Donna Williams does indeed discover who that "me" is.

5

Therapy and The Healing Process

Freud's case study of hysteria, the story of Dora, marked an important shift in his understanding of the psychoanalytic process. Prior to this, psychoanalysis had been approached as a sort of archaeological dig—a search for repressed childhood traumas which, when unearthed and placed under the psychoanalytic lens, could alleviate present-day neuroses. Insight was the key to cure; knowledge was the healing balm. What the case of Dora demonstrated for Freud, however, was that the psychoanalyst's role went beyond that of mere collector and interpreter of repressed data. The psychoanalytic relationship, he discovered, was just that: a relationship—and an important one to the process of healing. Psychoanalytic therapy involved not only the intellectual search for repressed memories, but also the often highly charged phenomenon of transference: the re-enactment of previous relationships within the therapeutic setting. The analyst functioned as an important sounding board for the analysand, enabling him or her to re-activate and resolve relational issues from the past. Psychological healing was brought about, therefore, through a combination of insight and therapeutic relationship.

Though many psychotherapists have since criticized and abandoned Freud's classical psychoanalytic method, the therapeutic importance of the therapist-client relationship has never since been questioned. The presence of a therapeutic "other," a trusted ally and guide who can assist the client through the processes of healing and self-discovery, is fundamental to many contemporary approaches to therapy. An important issue permeating this relationship between therapist and client is that of power. Many current schools of therapy have actively sought to correct the traditional power imbalance characteristic of the therapeutic situation by viewing the client not as a passive patient in submission to the authority of the doctor, but as an active agent of his or her own healing. Instead of presuming to be the sole agent of cure, the therapist takes on the role of catalyst, assisting the client in harnessing his or her own self-healing resources.

Feminist therapists are important proponents of this client-centred approach to healing; as Toni Ann Laidlaw and Cheryl Malmo put it, feminist therapists "act as facilitators or guides and as companions or witnesses in the clients' therapeutic journey" ("Introduction" 4). "While the therapist has a certain expertise (knowledge and skills) and can provide a safe place for therapeutic work," they point out, "the client is the expert on her own experience" (4). Feminist therapists seek to empower their clients, respecting and nurturing their ability to find their own answers and follow their own healing paths. As well, these therapists address the client's relationship not only with her immediate contacts, but with society at large.

> One of the ways in which feminist therapy differs from traditional psychoanalytic therapies is that it espouses change rather than adjustment

> to a societal standard. In this respect, it identifies with humanistic or third-force psychology, which also put forth the notion that the goal of therapy was a change of consciousness, a change of feelings toward oneself, and a change in one's relationship to society. (Laidlaw & Malmo 6)

For feminist therapists and their clients, it is societal issues of power that become a focus, particularly the power imbalances experienced by women as a group. Working primarily with women, often with women who have been abused, such therapists promote healing at the individual level, while at the same time functioning as critics of a society whose social inequities and gender biases all too often contribute to the original and ongoing disempowerment and silencing of their clients. Hence, feminist therapists operate on both a personal and a political level, and encourage their clients to do the same: to seek their own healing and, at the same time, to learn to recognize and deal with societal pressures which frequently work in opposition to that healing.

The texts I am looking at in this study are autobiographies of trauma and healing. They are stories of women who have experienced and recovered from personal tragedy and devastation. For these women, autobiographical writing, the process of narrating and renarrating their experience, functions as a form of therapy in their lives. Healing is closely intertwined with the process of telling, and of finding a narrative structure for their experience. And for many of them, personal healing also flowers into political action: these autobiographies not only express experiences of trauma and healing, but also move towards social critique. It is worthwhile, therefore, to look more closely at what is involved in the healing process for survivors of trauma as it takes place in the context of psychotherapy, particularly in therapies which focus on women's healing.

Trauma and Healing

In her book, *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Herman outlines the main stages of healing from psychological trauma. Looking at survivors of war and survivors of incest, she finds similarities in the post-traumatic stress disorders they experience, and describes a similar healing path. "The fundamental stages of recovery," she writes, "are establishing safety, reconstructing the trauma story, and restoring the connection between survivors and their communities" (3).

The first step, the establishment of safety, is an important one. "Survivors feel unsafe in their bodies," Herman notes. "Their emotions and their thinking feel out of control. They also feel unsafe in relation to other people" (160). Before any healing can take place, a sense of security must be established, both in the client's living environment and within the therapeutic relationship itself. Without a feeling of safety, without a trust and confidence in the therapist, the work of healing cannot begin.[1] Only after gaining that sense of safety, and feeling assured that the therapist will not betray her trust, or abandon her when she is in need, can the client's remembering begin.

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[1] And, as Herman notes, this trust does not come to pass easily: "Though the traumatized patient feels a desperate need to rely on the integrity and competence of the therapist, she cannot do so, for her capacity to trust has been damaged by the traumatic experience" (138). The transference which

The second stage, reconstructing the trauma story, or as Herman also calls it, remembrance and mourning, is a time of piecing together the fragments of a traumatized past. Secure from the threat of further abuse, and feeling trust and confidence in the therapeutic relationship, the survivor is ready to face, and re-experience through the telling, her traumatic history. "The goal of recounting the trauma story is integration, not exorcism," notes Herman. "In the process of reconstruction, the trauma story does undergo a transformation, but only in the sense of becoming more present and more real. The fundamental premise of the psychotherapeutic work is a belief in the restorative power of truth-telling" (181). Through the process of telling and retelling the dissociated trauma story, the survivor recontextualizes it and makes it her own. She is freed of its terrifying and terrorizing power:

> It appears...that the 'action of telling a story' in the safety of a protected relationship can actually produce a change in the abnormal processing of the traumatic memory. With this transformation of memory comes relief from many of the major symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. The *physioneurosis* induced by terror can apparently be reversed through the use of words. (Herman 183)

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typically takes place in such situations is a highly charged one, in which the client invokes and re-enacts the abusive dynamics of the original traumatic relationship.

Along with the telling, comes a mourning for the losses incurred by the trauma. The terror abates, but in its place is a profound sadness and a process of letting go.

With this letting go, comes the third stage: reconnection. Having come to terms with the past, the survivor is faced with the task of creating a future. It is a time of establishing new ties and commitments: finding new friends, discovering a community, and perhaps assuming a new task or mission. Having reclaimed the world and herself, the survivor begins a new life, a life which, for some, includes involvement in social justice issues.

> These survivors recognize a political or religious dimension in their misfortune and discover that they can transform the meaning of their personal tragedy by making it the basis for social action. While there is no way to compensate for an atrocity, there is a way to transcend it, by making it a gift to others. The trauma is redeemed only when it becomes the source of a survivor mission. (Herman 207)

These three stages--establishing safety and a trusting relationship, remembering and telling, and reconnecting with the world and oneself--are reflected in the therapeutic techniques used by various feminist psychotherapists in their work with abused women. A common tool in such therapies is the use of guided imagery: mobilizing the imagination in service of healing. What is interesting is how the stages of healing described by Herman are enacted not only in the relationship between therapist and client, but also within the psyche of the client herself. An inner healing drama takes place, in which the survivor learns to trust, listen to, and become an advocate for herself.

Cheryl Malmo, with her use of hypnotherapy, provides a good example. At the very outset of therapy, Malmo seeks to get to know her client, in order to establish a trusting therapeutic relationship. In accordance with her feminist stance, she empowers her client, assuring her that "she is the best expert when it comes to knowledge about herself; that she, not [Malmo], has the answers to her problems; and that she has everything that she needs to be healthy" (200). Having thus placed control in the hands of her client, Malmo begins with the hypnotherapy.

Within the hypnotic induction, she adds to the security of the consulting room by encouraging the client to locate, in her mind, a safe place--an imaginary haven in which she can find emotional retreat (201). She then introduces the idea of a special container, a place where disturbing feelings and images can be stowed (202). Finally, in preparation for the regression into memory, Malmo assists the client in identifying for herself a "spirit guide"--a wise and nurturing adult figure who can assist her through the trials of remembering (203-4). With these preparations made, the hypnotic journey into memory begins. Using the method of the "affective bridge"--in which current disturbing feelings are followed through to their repressed roots–Malmo assists the client in recalling, reliving, and responding to her traumatic past:

> What has happened is acknowledged by the therapist with calmness, understanding and compassion; feelings (confusion, hurt, anger, fear) that were repressed are identified and expressed and verbalized fully; needs of the young child are acknowledged and taken care of; inaccurate or destructive beliefs about the self that result in guilt or low self-esteem are reframed or replaced with healthy ones; resocializing or reparenting is accomplished. (206)

The aim of therapy is to assist the client in fostering for herself, within herself, a "healthy, constructive, supportive adult self" (206). The therapist and spirit guide, then, act together as models and midwives for that emerging self.

Psychologist Naida Hyde also uses imagery in her work with abuse survivors. Believing that imagery "has a power and a gentleness that are consistent with the psyche's best ability to heal itself" (165), Hyde assists her clients in harnessing their own creative and healing resources. Like Malmo, Hyde begins by guiding her client toward the establishment of a safe place in her mind (173). When this has been done, the client is ready to remember, or in Hyde's terms, she "dares to approach her 'child self'" (178). Reframed as a drama enacted between different selves, between different parts of the self, the therapy seeks to overcome the estrangement between characters and to foster mutual acceptance and nurturing. "The therapist must help the woman learn to truly parent her own child self. The imagery work powerfully conveys the complexity of that process" (179). The therapist helps in this process, but so does the figure of the spirit guide. Like the spirit guide in Malmo's hypnotherapy, this guiding figure functions as an inner resource for the client--a source of "comfort, wisdom, and companionship" (182). Together, therapist and spirit guide support the adult woman as she engages in the arduous task of rediscovering, listening to, and comforting her traumatized child self.

Healing from trauma, it becomes clear, requires telling. What these examples of feminist therapeutic practice especially stress is the appropriate context required, and the creativity involved in such telling. Herman's stages of healing are doubly addressed in these therapies. Not only is there the physical and emotional safety of the consulting room, but a psychic safety is established in the client's mind. And just as a healing relationship is forged between client and therapist, a similar bond is cultivated within the client between her broken self, and her inner spirit guide. Hence, the therapeutic drama of victimized and struggling client seeking assistance from the therapist is echoed as an inner drama, in which the client is the lost and frightened child, discovering within herself the nurturing guide needed for healing. The telling, then, so crucial to healing, takes place at two different levels: to the therapeutic other, but at the same time, to the healing "other" within the survivor herself.

Narrative Approaches to Therapy

What the above therapeutic approaches demonstrate is the centrality of the client's own imaginative work in the process of healing. The therapist is there as a confidante and guide, but the real task is for the client to discover and come to trust her own capacity for self-nurture and self-direction, personified in the figures of the internal "parent" and "spirit-guide." Healing comes about when the client is able to tell, and eventually use her creativity to transform her own narrative.

As Judith Herman points out, the process of telling--of breaking the silence in order to recount the events of a traumatic past--is crucial to healing from that past. With the telling comes remembrance and mourning, and the ability to move on. This telling, however, takes a particular form: a narrative form. What emerges from the traumatized client is not an objective report of personal data, nor simply a catalogue of injuries inflicted; it is a *story* the survivor tells. Healing from trauma involves a process of narrating and renarrating the traumatic past, not in order to exorcise it, as Herman comments, but to integrate it into the client's ongoing life (181).

Though the process of telling plays a part in virtually every sort of psychotherapy, self-consciously narrative approaches to therapy have especially emerged among practitioners coming from a psychoanalytic background. It is not surprising that this would be the case: psychoanalysis, though traditionally proceeding along scientific lines as an archaeological dig for repressed data, has nevertheless always emphasized the process of telling. What some psychoanalysts are now stressing, however, is that it is this very process of narrativizing experience, rather than strictly the material that emerges, which brings about healing. The "talking cure" comes to be not primarily because of *what* is spoken, but because of the fact *that* it is spoken, and the manner *in which* it is spoken.

Roy Schafer is an important figure in this regard. Reinterpreting traditional psychoanalysis along narrative lines, Schafer sees his role as that of co-author of his clients' emerging life-narratives. Working on the premise that "the self is a telling" (35), Schafer seeks to assist those whose life-narrative has become stultified, cramping, or too out of touch with the narratives of those around them. "If analysis is a matter of moving in a direction," he writes, "it is a matter of moving forward into new modes of constructing experience" (36). Schafer responds to his clients' tentative tellings by providing his own interpretive retellings of their story. As a result of this process of mutual telling and retelling in the context of the psychoanalytic dialogue, the client gradually becomes a more confident, creative--and daring--narrator of his or her own experience.

Donald Spence is another psychoanalyst who takes a narrative approach in his work. Probably his best known theoretical contribution is the notion of "narrative truth." "Narrative truth can be defined as the criterion we use to decide when a certain experience has been captured to our satisfaction," he explains,

> it depends on continuity and closure and the extent to which the fit of the pieces takes on an aesthetic finality. Narrative truth is what we have in mind when we say that such and such a story, that a given explanation carries conviction, that *one* solution to a mystery must be true. Once a given construction has acquired narrative truth, it becomes just as real as any other kind of truth, this new reality becomes a significant part of the psychoanalytic cure. (31)

Abandoning the archaeological model, Spence suggests that therapeutic efficacy results not primarily from the unearthing of past facts (what he terms "historical truth") but from the narrative integration of these facts with ongoing experience in the present. An emphasis is placed here on the creativity involved in the healing process. Interpretation is explanatory, he suggests, but also inventive, and it is this very process of invention and the aesthetic harmony it seeks which gives narrative its therapeutic power: "...it is the excitement of the discovery, in finding an explanation or participating in its unfolding, that accounts for its therapeutic effect much more than the substantive nature of the reasoning. In other words, it is the interpretation as a creative act--as a piece of narrative truth--that takes precedence" (164). And further, "not just any narrative will do; ...coherence and completeness are necessary but not sufficient; and...an important ingredient of the power to persuade is the aesthetic nature of the narrative" (270).

Schafer's and Spence's models echo what the philosophers and academic psychologists have to say about narrative identity. If our selves are, indeed, narrative constructions, then it comes as no surprise that therapeutic approaches which emphasize and facilitate this process of autobiographical story telling would prove efficacious. As well, the therapeutic focus upon client creativity in these narrative approaches resounds with the imaginative explorations facilitated in the feminist therapies I've described. And certainly the fictional self-inventions of *The Words to Say It* and the autobiographical narration and renarration of *Nobody Nowhere* and *Somebody Somewhere* provide good examples of the therapeutic import of the creative process of narrative truth-telling.

At the same time, however, these narrative theories do not adequately theorize or provide room for the more political dimensions of these women's autobiographies. While drawing important attention to the therapeutic pragmatics of clinical story-telling, and underscoring the healing function of creativity in processes of self-discovery, these theories (particularly Spence's) also run the risk of becoming disturbingly ahistorical. "Once we shift to the idea that we can create truth by statement," Spence himself comments, "...we have left the domain of archaeology and opened up new and dangerous doors" (177). And dangerous doors they are indeed, for in focussing only on the present tense and purely personal truths of such narrations, these psychotherapists come to assume that, in Spence's words, "questions about their historical truth are either impossible to answer–as in the case of creative utterances–or relatively unimportant" (276). Clearly, however, the historical importance and social ramifications of issues such as abuse are not "unimportant." When situations of social injustice come to figure in clinical narratives, a sole focus on "narrative truth" in the sense that Spence defines it, is problematic, and in danger of inviting moral quietism.[2]

The feminist therapies I've looked at are instructive in this respect, recognizing as they do the crucial linkages between the public and the personal, the social and the therapeutic. They do not set up a binary opposition between historical fact and personal narrative truth; instead, the two are intimately bound up with each other: personal therapy involves a recognition of the ways in which an individual is implicated in sociopolitical structures, and personal narrative can be a means of responding to and correcting imbalances and injustices in such structures. For the women these therapists work with, as for the women whose autobiographies I'm studying, "narrative truth," with its implicit creativity and personal resonances, is also a matter of public and social, historical interest, bringing "narrative truth" in some cases, to what stand as "historical lies." Elly Danica's autobiography, *Don't: A Woman's Word* especially highlights this interrogative and revisionary dimension of personal therapeutic writing.

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[2] In a recent article entitled "Narrative Truth and Putative Child Abuse," Spence urges caution in both therapeutic and juridical settings against too quickly assuming the historical veracity of every recalled memory of child abuse. Emotional rhetoric should not replace evidential argument, he argues quite reasonably, particularly in legal settings. Towards the end of the article, however, Spence's tone changes from one of reasoned cautiousness to one bordering on reactionary skepticism about the truth-value of *any* recalled memory of early childhood abuse:

> No matter how traumatic, this kind of instant recovery of an early memory would seem to violate a good deal of what we know about archival memory, long-term storage and decay, and fly in the face of conclusions that have been accumulating in the experimental study of memory for the past 60 years. (301)

In contrast to the feminist therapeutic stance of empathy and support, Spence insists that "the responsible therapist needs to remain skeptical to a fault" (299). Those who nevertheless do take the step of affirming and believing in the validity of their clients' reports, he suggests, are being unscientific–dupes, he implies, to the false rhetoric of their clients' narratives and hence indistinguishable from the rest of a "confused public" (301). In this scenario that Spence creates, "narrative truth" would appear to be a purely private and therapeutic matter, of no social consequence. Unlike those he puts down, however, Spence himself suggests no interest in finding some means of addressing the social and moral issues at stake in this child abuse-false memory debate.

6

"Writing. Writing. Writing. Who will hear me?": Reading Elly Danica's *Don't: A Woman's Word*

Reading *Don't*

*"DON'T. I only know this word....Don't tell. Don't think. Don't, what ever else you do, don't feel." Elly Danica's opening words quickly become my own as I enter her text. Don't read this book--it might be too disturbing. Don't let the words sink in--it might hurt too much. But I read on. "Pain will reach out of your belly and grab you by the throat," I read, "Choking. His hands around my throat....Pain like a mountain....The mountain never ends, it grows in me daily, my belly expanding to hold it....Monster. Monstrous. Me. Mary, Mary, quite monstrous in my belly Mary Shelley" (*Don't *7).*

Stop. Where am I? What is this choking nightmare of nursery rhymes and monsters I suddenly find myself in? DON'T, I want to cry out: Don't tell me this, don't make me think about it--don't make me feel. But I do feel: the pain grabs me too. Like it or not, I am in the text: caught. How do I get out?

Don't: A Woman's Word is an incest narrative. In this book, Elly Danica autobiographically recounts the story of a child emotionally and physically shattered by sexual abuse. She writes about a young woman paralyzed by depression and self-hatred. And finally, she shares with the reader the triumph of a survivor who, through the power of words, is able to experience release in the declaration: "Blessings. I dream. I love. I am" (94). But this affirmation of self is not achieved easily: it comes only after great pain.

Don't takes the form of a journey into memory: "I don't want to remember," writes Danica. "Memory pursues me. Memory runs out of the ends of my fingers and makes marks on paper" (12). What we read are those marks, those memories which refuse to be forgotten. And they are difficult to read. One by one, Danica graphically recounts the nightmarish scenes of her childhood. Invoking the Sumerian myth of Inanna, the goddess who makes a descent into the underworld, Danica structures her own journey as a passage through the successive gates of hell--each gate marks entry into another memory, more terrifying than the last.

Elly Danica's book is disturbing to read. Incest is disturbing. Violence is disturbing. But the disturbance created in the reader by this book is not entirely explained by its content: other incest narratives have been published, but none has had quite the same impact on its readers as Danica's.[1] *Don't* connects with its readers and elicits powerful responses. At public readings women line up not only to speak with Danica, but to touch her. "They want to connect with me," she comments. "They want eye contact, they want to have a verbal contact, and they want to hold my hand while they do this" (Williamson, "once" 90). What is it that makes this particular narrative so explosive, and so compelling to its readers? Danica herself suggests an answer: "I very much wanted to see a change in how society looks at incest," she comments, "I wanted to present on paper the pain of this experience with no space between the text and the reader. No distance" (Williamson, "risk" 79). I think she has succeeded in her aim. By denying the reader a dissociating distance, *Don't* refuses a complacent reading.

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[1] Other published incest narratives include Charlotte Vale Allen's *Daddy's Girl: A Very Personal Memoir*, Louise Armstrong's *Kiss Daddy Goodnight: A Speak-Out on Incest*, Sylvia Fraser's *My Father's House: A Memoir of Incest and of Healing*, Betsy Petersen's *Dancing With Daddy: A Childhood Lost and a Life Regained*, Beth Goobie's *Scars of Light*, and Liza Potvin's *White Lies (for my mother)*.

What I'd like to explore here is that space, that interface between text and reader. What I want to suggest is that the distressing immediacy we experience when reading Danica's text stems from the fact that *Don't* not only tells *of* an experience of abuse, but also reinscribes the dynamics of abuse at the level of reading. But this is only half the story. Danica's text disturbs, but it also empowers; it emotionally entraps its readers, but also sets them free. This is important. There is a process involved here: a healing process. For Danica, the years of remembering and writing proved wrenching but ultimately vital to her journey of healing (Williamson, "risk" 80-82, "once" 93-94). Her readers--those in particular who have experienced similar forms of abuse, but also those who have not--have also attested to the therapeutic value of this book: "Your book changed my life" are words Danica often hears (Williamson, "once" 90). I suggest that this reading effect in large part stems from the way this book is written: if *Don't* initially evokes an experience of violation, it also suggests and textually facilitates a means of resolution for those readers who, like Elly Danica herself, are persistent, and willing to walk the full mile. In short, *Don't* narrates the story of one woman's journey from incest to healing, but at the same time it functions as a powerful matrix for the reader, structuring, at the level of reading--within the reader--an analogous experience of trauma and recovery.[2]

Textual Violation

In the opening of this chapter, I enacted a scene from my own experience of reading Danica's autobiography. I present parts of that reading here because the experience was an intense one and is, I believe, pertinent to an exploration of the reading dynamics of this text. Reviews of Danica's book, and my own discussions with other readers have confirmed that I am not alone in having responded to this text with powerful emotion. In writing about this book, hence, I've chosen to take this personal reading experience as a starting point, using my own responses as clues which point to dimensions of the text not as easily accessed by more conventional approaches to criticism.

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[2] I borrow the term "matrix" from Phil Powrie who, in his essay on Marie Cardinal's *Les Mots pour le dire*, suggests that certain texts are especially compelling because of the unconscious processes they activate in their readers. I think that *Don't* is one such book.

I have read *Don't: A Woman's Word* several times now, and know what horrors it contains, yet I am never quite immune from the painful shock of those opening pages; though I keep reminding myself of the emotional resolution to come, I nevertheless experience, each time I reread it, moments of bewilderment and confusion. I feel emotionally assaulted by this text: stripped of my readerly defences. Violated.

Textually violated. "The writing itself violates the reader's boundaries, which break down," Janice Williamson comments in her interview. "It's as though the reader symptomatically experiences the pain" ("risk" 79). One of the cruel legacies of incest is the shattering of personal boundaries: the woman emerging from her father's house in Danica's book is not whole, but fragmented--a "woman made of potshards" (*Don't* 13). *Don't* poignantly depicts and describes this devastation, but goes even further: it also reinvokes it by reproducing a situation of violation at the textual level. By breaking narrative convention, by catching the reader off guard, *Don't* temporarily destabilizes and traumatizes the reader with its words. In so doing, it ensures that the reader come to terms with the issue of abuse not only through a leap of the imagination, but also, as Williamson puts it, "symptomatically," as part of the reading process itself.

> She washes dishes. She's good at washing dishes. What else do we need her for? Why should I feed her? She's useless. I'll get a dishwasher,

> you plug them in, they don't talk back. She doesn't talk. Talk when I tell you. Smile goddamnit. Smile or I'll fix your face so it will do what I want.
>
> Wanting. He always wants. I don't want. Who asked you? (*Don't* 8).

Where are the quotation marks that will help me find my way? Who is speaking here, and to whom? Who is the "she," the "he"? Who is the "I" that seems to keep shifting? And who is the "you" so viciously addressed? Is it someone in the text, or are those words meant for me? I can't be sure. I temporarily lose my bearings. The narrative space closes in on me, trapping me in a confusing cacophony of hostile voices. I don't like this: it's upsetting. How do I get out?

Fight or flight. As the cliche suggests, when confronted by something threatening, our immediate response is either to control the danger by aggressively subduing it, or to escape it by running away. One way of responding to Danica's text at this point of readerly distress is to dismiss its revelations as false, to treat them as the fabrications of a bitter and deluded woman. The text lures us in that direction: "Nightmare. I'm awake," writes Danica. "How can this be a dream? I wish it was a dream. I could forget if it was a dream. Please tell me this was a dream. Tell me I'm wrong. Tell me I can't remember it. Tell me it was too long ago. Tell me kids get it wrong" (13).

I'm tempted: here is a possible avenue of escape–if it's not true it can't hurt me. And even if it is true, the pain can be analysed. Analysed away. I need only fill in the narrative gaps to prevent myself from falling headlong into them–fill in the spaces surrounding the text with notes: my own, safer, discourse. Contain the danger with a diagnosis--a psychiatric or, perhaps, an academic diagnosis. Find a theory which will explain it, arrange it, frame it.

"Click. Tilt your head. Click. Open your mouth alittle. Click. Wet your lips again. Hold it right there. Click. Smile" (52). The camera. Danica exposes the implications of this urge to dismissively and defensively theorize and diagnose her text. Framing her narrative, posing her words to suit some authoritative discourse, risks a complicity with the pornographer father. Clinically dissecting her text, analytically isolating and cutting out the painful elements, risks repeating his butchery: "He wants to carve the boils from my face. He wanted to be a doctor" (11). Such reading tactics might ensure a safe emotional distance for the reader, but it comes at the price of the child–the child victimized in Danica's text.

This is too difficult. Maybe if I just close the book right now it'll leave me alone. Maybe I'll throw it away, destroy it, and pretend to myself that I'd never seen it. It might work: I might forget. But then again, perhaps I will continue reading. I'll just *steel myself when the tough passages come. I'll close my eyes, or skip them altogether. I'll read, but turn myself off.*

Flight. Instead of taking the aggressive tack, the reader can respond to this moment of readerly violation by running away. As before, however, Danica makes clear the implications of adopting such a reading position. If aggressive co-option of the text risks complicity with the abusive father, passive retreat–emotional retreat–comes dangerously close to repeating the denial and silent acquiescence of the mother: "Who will help me? My mother will not meet my eyes. My mother walks away. My mother knows. She knows. She always knows" (9). Danica is more forgiving of this response. She is forgiving of her mother, recognizing that she too is a victim (Williamson, "risk" 78). And, similarly, perhaps not all readers are ready or able to deal with the material presented in this book. Readers with their own unresolved memories of abuse may not be in an emotional situation where they are able to cope with the demands of this book. This is understandable, but at the same time *Don't* makes it clear that even this response, or non-response, has its price: it leaves the child abandoned and bereft.

I'm trapped–caught in a double-bind. Hardly have I opened up the book and started to read than I find myself enmeshed in a confusing and hostile textual environment. Where is the narrative which will explain it to me, which will mediate *and protect me from the brutality of these words? I'm seized by an impulse to take control of this text in some way, or else to brush it off. But I feel thwarted: I cannot, with good conscience, take either route.*

As a reader I feel trapped in a highly disturbing, apparently no-win situation. Danica's text puts puts me there, positioning me in the same place she finds herself as she embarks on her journey of remembering: in the shoes of the abused and suffering child. Danica doesn't like it either, and she, too, resists. "Don't tell. Don't think," she warns herself. "Don't, what ever else you do, don't feel. If you feel, the pain will be there again" (7). Though she recognizes that the resisting "Don't"--a woman's word--is a powerful word which must be shouted out in the face of oppression, she also realizes that when it becomes internalized and directed at oneself, it can cripple and silence: "I can not write with only this word" (7). In risking the pain of writing and remembering, Danica transforms the repressive "don't" into a healing "do": *do* tell, *do* think, and, above all, *do* feel. And she implicitly urges the reader to do the same: to allow that experience of pain to happen; not to run away or seek to control it, but to face it, and work through it. The only way out of the double-bind, it becomes clear, is to go in deeper, avowing with Danica a "faith in the process" (14). For the reader who is willing to take that step, who is willing, through identification with the suffering child, to share with

Danica the burden of pain, the text does open up. Textual violation leads to textual healing.

Textual Healing

From amid the chaos of hostile and death-dealing voices, there emerges a small voice which holds out the promise of hope and survival: "There is something he can't touch. Inside. Very far away. Just a little light" (8). And again we hear it: "A tiny light. If he doesn't know about it I can keep it. My secret. My soul. A self. A star. Millions of light years away. I search" (9).

It is a difficult and excruciatingly painful journey. Danica's star-search leads her first downward: like the goddess Inanna, whose story Danica invokes, she makes a descent into hell, the hell of her memories. Memories that lead her deeper and deeper into the nightmare that was her childhood. Memories that drag her back down to the place she most wants to--but cannot--forget: the basement floor. The scene of her rape. The night of her death.

The horror. The Fifth Gate. "I peel myself out of my own skin," I read. "I am no longer myself. I am someone else" (Don't *53). I too move out of my own body, and feel the pain I am reading about. I enter that body of pain. "It hurts. I cry. It hurts. It hurts. It hurts so much" (58). Faces begin to blur. Whose pain is it I am feeling? Whose cries do I hear? Memories of my own begin to surface: the* *unheard screams of a child I love, the aftermath of a scene of abuse, a terrible brokenness... Elly's pain brings me back there: to my own, different, nightmare; to my own previously unfelt pain. I too would rather forget, but cannot. I don't want to feel either, but I do: the body of pain is mine too...*

"Inanna had insurance. If I'm gone too long, come for me. Who will be my insurance? Who will bribe the guardians of darkness and bring me back to the light? Who could find all the pieces? How can this be done? How can this not be done? Faith in the process" (14). A new position opens up for the reader. Inanna had a friend. According to the Sumerian myth, the goddess makes a descent into the underworld, but before leaving on her journey, she asks her friend Ninshubur to arrange her rescue, should she not resurface (Wolkstein and Kramer 53-55). Ninshubur agrees, and is true to her word: when Inanna doesn't reappear, she comes to her aid, rescuing her in the aftermath of a cruel death, and enabling her resurrection (62-67). In invoking this myth, and identifying herself with the goddess, Danica finds a narrative structure for her own journey, and gives meaning to her suffering. And in so doing, she also invokes the presence of that loyal and life-insuring friend. That presence, that person, I suggest, is the reader, directly hailed by Danica when she writes: "If I'm gone too long, come for me" (14). For Danica at the time of writing, the presence of that person, that reader, was not guaranteed. Through an act of faith–faith in the process, faith in the possibility of reemergence--she reached forward to a future reader who would, indeed, assume that crucial, enabling role. In reading her text, I suggest, the reader is given an opportunity to confirm that faith and, in an important way, participate in the healing process. The reader interpellated is one who, having made the initial commitment to read the book in neither an aggressive or passive way, will, like Ninshubur, remain true to that commitment and not abandon the remembering woman, or her text in its darkest hour. This reader is one who, from a position of strength, will actively and persistently read Elly back to the surface, and, in the aftermath of silence and depression, read her into speech and into life.

Hence, a splitting takes place in the reader: the reader simultaneously occupies two reading positions. But unlike the dissociative splitting which occurs in the basement, when Elly peels herself out of her own skin in response to the brutal assault (53), this splitting, which is probably better described as a doubling, is in the service of healing. It is analogous to the doubled position of the "I" speaking in the text--the "I" who is at once the suffering child, in the midst of the abuse, and the adult woman, reliving her memories from within the sanctuary of her womb-like church (89). Elly Danica, anchored as she is in the safety of the present, is able to work her way through, and out of, the nightmare of her past. The reader, in identifying with the suffering child and woman, while at the same time adopting the position of facilitating "other" through identification with the

Ninshubur figure, repeats this narratorial doubling, and is also provided with a means to work through this text. If the initial pages of *Don't* close the narrative space in order to effect an identification with the suffering woman and child, these later pages reopen the narrative with the introduction of this new figure, creating a safe place, a therapeutic space, in which healing can take place. Healing for Elly Danica, but also for the reader. For in identifying with the Ninshubur figure the reader not only responds to Danica, but also to that part of herself which identifies, to whatever degree, with her pain.

Faith in the process.

Current feminist approaches to therapy have emphasized the importance of self-nurturing in the healing process. Psychological and emotional healing, particularly for women who have been abused, involves a process of what is sometimes called "reparenting": recovering through memory the traumatized child, discovering and fostering within oneself the presence of a nurturing adult figure, and establishing a healing relationship between the two (Laidlaw and Malmo). We see this process taking place in *Don't*. From the safety of her rural sanctuary, and at the lead of her pen, Danica re-enters the ravaged mind and body of her child-self. But in the process of writing this memory text, she also imagines for herself, and begins to discover within herself, that necessary, enabling "other." And likewise, through a double-identification with the suffering child and this implied "other," the reader also experiences, in the very act of reading, the dynamics of the healing process.

Faith in the Process

"Writing. Writing. Writing. Who will hear me?" (*Don't* 92). When we enter Danica's text we become witnesses to a situation of abuse and trauma: a response is demanded. As Judith Herman aptly puts it,

> ...those who bear witness are caught in the conflict between victim and perpetrator. It is morally impossible to remain neutral in this conflict. The bystander is forced to take sides.
>
> It is very tempting to take the side of the perpetrator. All the perpetrator asks is that the bystander do nothing. He appeals to the universal desire to see, hear, and speak no evil. The victim, on the contrary, asks the bystander to share the burden of pain. The victim demands action, engagement, and remembering. (7-8)

Don't: A Woman's Word is a difficult book to read and respond to precisely because of the moral conflict it throws its readers into. Like the bystander who inadvertently becomes witness to a scene of abuse, the reader of Danica's text is compelled to take a stand and adopt a reading position: there is no neutral ground.

Danica doesn't make this process easy. In contrast to many other incest narratives, which typically guide reader responses along desired avenues by means of mediating narratives (which also function as narrative buffers, emotionally protecting readers from the most disturbing scenes), *Don't* places the burden of choice squarely on the reader's shoulders. The text heightens the intensity of this moment of decision by making the choices of symbolic complicity with the perpetrator--both active and passive--extremely tempting: these are the positions which demand the least amount of emotional investment, and provide the highest degree of self-preservation.

To take the side of the victim, however, which entails the opening up of oneself to an especially painful reading experience, is the choice the text quietly but urgently asks the reader to make. *Don't* hails the reader, challenges the reader to risk emotional involvement with the text by allowing an identification with the suffering victim to happen. For those readers who respond to this call and open themselves up to the trauma of this book, *Don't* also enables healing. Readerly commitment--a faith in the process--is rewarded with an experience of ascent and reemergence, culminating in the words: "Blessings. I dream. I love. I am" (*Don't* 94).

But *Don't: A Woman's Word* does not end here. If it hails the reader into emotional participation, *Don't* also sends out a call for action. Danica's autobiography is a personal and therapeutic text--both for its author and its readers--but it is also a political document, a blasting speak out against a society which too often blankets the cries of the abused with a complacent silence. It is precisely because Danica's book is about social justice as well as personal healing that the issue of reader response becomes so urgent, for the text provides a matrix not only for therapeutic processes, as mentioned above, but also for the testing of social and ethical conscience. It matters how we read this book. A refusal to respond to and empathize with the victim in the early pages of the narrative not only eliminates any therapeutic effects the book might have for its reader, but also implicitly perpetuates the silence and denial which victims of abuse have constantly to struggle against in their quest for survival.

With this book, Danica begins to break that silence. Using her "woman's word" she interrogates the social and institutional structures which colluded in her disempowerment.[3] With its dual function as personal therapy and political act, *Don't: A Woman's Word* stands as what Sidonie Smith calls an "autobiographical manifesto": a life text which seeks to effect sociopolitical change through the personal voice. Invoking a painful past in service of an emancipated future, it is an autobiography in which "the 'I' writes under the sign of hope" (Smith 163).

Rita Felski uses the term "feminist confession" to describe texts such as Danica's. Feminist confessional writing, according to Felski, is life-writing in which the intimate autobiographical revelations of individual writers function also to promote solidarity among women. By "delineating the specific problems and experiences which bind women together," such texts help foster a sense of "communal female identity" (Felski 94, 95). "Don't" is not only Elly Danica's word, but also, as she suggests in her title, "a woman's word." In telling her own story, then, Danica also tells the story of countless other women who are survivors of sexual abuse, mobilizing through her writing, by means of the identifications it elicits, a community of women in search of healing and justice. What makes Danica's text stand out from other such texts, and begin to move beyond Felski's definition, however, is the insistent narrative strategies she uses to facilitate such identification, and the scope of the readership she hails. One need not have experienced similar horrors as Danica in order to experience both the trauma and healing of her book: the abuse is re-enacted at the level of the text, and the book draws upon whatever experiences of pain the reader brings to the text to evoke the emotions that it does. Also, it becomes clear that this text is meant not only for women and survivors, but for anyone who is willing to read it: it is a therapeutic text, but at the same time it engages its reader in an intense drama of ethics and social responsibility. In *Don't*, then, individual healing is inextricably bound up with social critique and political action: both are part of the process described in and activated by her text.

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[3] See Linda Warley's "Inhabiting Contradiction: The Female Subject in *Don't: A Woman's Word*" and Janice Williamson's "'I Peel Myself out of My Own Skin': Reading *Don't: A Woman's Word*" for more detailed discussions of this text as feminist political practice.

"Writing. Writing. Writing. Who will hear me?" (*Don't* 92). There is a quiet urgency about this book. Penetrating through the nightmarish scenes of violation and abuse is a child's voice, crying out for help; a child's eyes, seeking out those of her mother. The search for those eyes--eyes which will respond with acknowledgement, empathy and action--is not completed within the narrative, but continues beyond the pages of the text. At one point in the text Danica describes a scene in which, as an adult, she gives her mother a book:

> The book is a bomb. In it daughters tell their mothers about fathers raping, fathers beating. I hope she will read at least one hundred pages. I know she will not even open it. I don't know if she took it home. She never speaks about it again. (36)

Though her mother's eyes remain averted, this scene suggests the hope that another book--Danica's book--might be received differently. *Don't*, too, is a bomb. It is an explosive piece of autobiographical writing that disturbs the sensibilities and threatens the status quo. Implicit in this passage is an appeal to the perhaps ambivalent reader who holds Danica's book in hand: "Don't walk away," it says. "Do take this book and read it, and having read it, speak, and continue to speak, about it." It is an appeal for engagement and action--for faith in the process of healing and change.

7

A Hermeneutics of Intersubjectivity

Fragmentation and the Search for Wholeness

What these autobiographies of trauma and healing have in common is a search for self in the face of fragmentation. Trauma, be it the result of abuse, madness, autism, or incest, leads to a situation where the autobiographer is no longer able to recognize herself. A disintegration takes place which brings about a crisis of identity: "Who am I?" "What am I?" and even "Am I?" are the questions urgently asked.

Donna Williams describes a life fraught with fragmentation. Experiencing difficulty with sensory integration, and psychically split into multiple personalities, Donna is emotionally isolated from the world of others and profoundly estranged from herself and her own body. Prior to the narrative integration brought about through her autobiographies, Williams' "self" is held together only by the contents of the tea chest, her collection of "bits and pieces" (163): "I lived far more in my things than I did in my body. Leaving them packed away, uncorrupted, meant that they were retrievable later when it would be safe yet again to get close to myself and my feelings" (164).

If psychic fragmentation yields for Williams dissociation from the body, for Danica and Cardinal, such fragmentation is very much mirrored and experienced pain."[1] Functioning metaphorically as a means of conveying the acute pain of existential crisis, the suffering body is also a literal fact for these women. Mental and emotional distress is accompanied by an experience of physical torment. "The woman made of potshards," Elly Danica writes of herself:

> Pieces. Not herself. Never herself. Who is herself? Only broken pieces. Each one removed grows a new piece in its place. The wounds fester. There is no healing. The bleeding cannot be staunched. There is no healing....No. Only the pieces. Only the pain. (13-14)

Marie Cardinal also experiences her body--herself--as an open and festering wound, a haemorrhage which up until the start of her analysis refuses to heal. Like Danica's, Cardinal's bleeding cannot be staunched. She locates the origins of her brokenness in the curbside conversation with her mother. Cutting "like so many mutilating swords," the mother's words--a revelation of her repeated attempts to abort her unborn daughter--tear apart the flesh and psyche of the girl: "There on the street, in a few sentences, she put out my eyes, pierced my eardrums, scalped me, cut off my hands, shattered my kneecaps, tortured my stomach, and mutilated my genitals....She was discharging her madness onto me; I was the sacrifice" (135).

Numb, broken and bleeding, reduced to physical as well as psychological pieces, these autobiographers find themselves in desperate need of some sense of coherent and stable selfhood. "Who could find all the pieces?" asks Danica (13). And Cardinal says of her pastiche self: "Day after day since my birth, I had been made up: my gestures, my attitudes, my vocabulary....The void. Who was I?" (164). These women eventually do, however, achieve through their life writing a sense of self-coherence and existential continuity. Remembering and telling all the "pieces," Danica embraces wholeness at the end of her narrative with the words, "Blessings. I dream. I love. I am" (94). Cardinal, as a result of a seven-year psychoanalysis, and through her subsequent novelistic retellings of her story, is able to salve the wounded flesh of her girlhood, reclaim her body, and discover herself. And Williams' autobiographies conclude with the emergence of Donna, a woman who, though long silent and silenced, nevertheless surfaces and finds a voice in the narrative integration of her multiple personalities, rediscovering her feeling body along the way. A process of self-emergence is narrated and a hard-won sense of wholeness celebrated by these women. But what is the nature of this emerging self which perseverance and a will to survive lead these women to discover?

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[1] I borrow this phrase from Elaine Scarry's book *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of Language*.

Poststructuralist theories of subjectivity, with their deconstruction of foundationalist and essentialist notions of selfhood, would seem to deny the possibility of such an experience, or at least dismiss it as self-deception or false consciousness. Calling into question the autonomous and unitary self of humanism, poststructuralists posit instead a decentered and divided "subject," produced through the vicissitudes of language and ideology. Taking this view, as we've seen, some theorists of autobiography suggest that, like the Lacanian mirror which provides an impression of subjective stability and plenitude at the very moment that it confirms the ultimate fragmentedness of existence, life-writing can do no more than effect a clever illusion of unified and coherent selfhood. Paradoxically, then, "life" narratives are about death, exposing, according to this view, the very inability of language to express and facilitate life. In Paul de Man's words,

> Death is a displaced name for a linguistic predicament, and the restoration of mortality by autobiography...deprives and disfigures to the precise extent that it restores. Autobiography veils a defacement of the mind of which it is itself the cause. (930)

These poststructuralist theories, bringing to the fore as they do the complex relationship between subjectivity and language, make important contributions to our understanding of autobiography. Indeed, autobiography is not simply a straightforward reflection of an undivided and entirely conscious self. Yet at the same time, if the traditional humanist model of "self" is too static and individualistic to aptly characterize the intersubjective nature of these autobiographies, the poststructuralist theorizations of subjectivity do not adequately explain that genuine sense of wholeness sought after and ultimately experienced by the autobiographers I've been looking at. "This unity of my being," writes Cardinal, "this cohesion of nights and days permitted me to move out towards other people, to meet them, to know them, often to understand them, sometimes even to love and be loved by them. I was happy, I had confidence in myself" (249). Are these women deluded about themselves, having simply exchanged unhappy fictions of self for no-less-illusory happy ones?

Is there some alternative way of theorizing subjectivity which does not fall into the either/or dichotomy set up by the poststructuralists? In her book *Thinking Fragments,* Jane Flax comments that as the "postmodernists construct subjectivity, only two alternatives appear: a 'false' unitary and essentialist self or an equally nondifferentiated but totally historically or textually constituted 'true' one" (210).[2] Is there an approach to the question of subjectivity which is able to incorporate poststructuralism's pertinent critiques of the humanist (or Enlightenment) self without at the same time falling prey to its typical incredulity and suspicion about even the very possibility of selfhood?[3] Is there a way to take seriously poststructuralist insights into the function of language in the construction of subjectivity, without having thereby to dismiss the self as an illusory construct, or as merely an "effect" of language? And finally, is it possible to use poststructuralist categories to analyse instances of split, or dispersed subjectivity (as emerge quite dramatically in these autobiographies of trauma and healing), without at the same time celebrating subjective fragmentation as an aesthetic goal? This last question is an important one. Speaking from her clinical experience with individuals suffering from the acute fragmentation of personality characteristic of "borderline syndrome," Flax, a practicing psychoanalyst, remarks,

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[2] Flax attributes this postmodernist dichotomy to the fact that gender, and women's experiences of subjectivity, have not been taken into account (210). This argument parallels that made by many feminist theorists of autobiography: that both humanist and poststructuralist poetics of the genre are male-biased in that they do not pay heed to or adequately describe the dynamics of women's life writing.

[3] A word on terminology. I've chosen to use the more specific term poststructuralist (rather than the more broadly defined, and oft-debated term "postmodernist") to describe theorizations of the subject as dispersed, decentred and non-referential. Some of the people I quote, however, conflate the two. There is also inconsistency in how the various disciplines have structured the poststructuralist/postmodernist debate: in the sciences, particularly psychology, an opposition is set up between poststructuralism and positivism, among literary theorists, the battle is typically described as being waged between poststructuralism and humanism, and for the philosophers, the binarism set up is that between poststructuralism and Cartesian (Enlightenment) thinking. Though there are of course important distinctions to be made between positivism, humanism, and Cartesianism, for reasons of clarity, I'm treating them here as variations within the same

> Those who celebrate or call for a "decentered" self seem self-deceptively naive and unaware of the basic cohesion within themselves that makes the fragmentation of experiences something other than a terrifying slide into psychosis. These writers seem to confirm the very claims of those they have contempt for, that a sense of continuity or "going on being" is so much a part of the core self that it becomes a taken-for-granted background. (218-219)

In *Thinking Fragments* Flax hints at what an alternative view of the self might look like. Taking seriously poststructuralist theorizations of subjectivity, and bringing to bear concerns of psychoanalysis and feminism, she begins to develop this notion of a "core self." Not the unitary, rational self of the Enlightenment, but

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theoretical camp, and shifting in my use of the terms, depending on the disciplinary context I'm addressing.

neither the dispersed and decentered "non-self" of poststructuralism, Flax's "core self" does not readily lend itself to traditional dualistic categorizations. Multiple, rather than unitary (or non-existent), and intuitively experienced, rather than rationally (or irrationally) deduced, such a conception of self chafes against the received language of subjectivity.

It is nevertheless possible, Flax argues, to imagine a self "which...does not experience difference as irreconcilable or the existence of others as an *a priori* threat to getting what it wants."

> Thus it does not fall into the sense of alienation and permanent estrangement that Lacan attributes to a 'decentered' or nonunitary self. Unlike the postmodernists' vision such a self would also feel no need to forswear the use of logic, rational thought, or objectivity, although it may play with them. Neither would it lose itself and imagine the I to be merely the effect of thinking or language rather than also its cause. It would also know itself to be social, to be dependent for its existence on others. Yet at the same time it could experience itself as possessing an internal world that is never exactly like any other. (219)

Flax struggles here to articulate a type of self which is foreign to established modes of thinking and speaking about subjectivity--it is no wonder that most of her definition is couched in descriptions of what this "core self" is *not*. "To glimpse such a self," she herself acknowledges, " is also to confront a paradox: It cannot fully exist within contemporary culture" (220). In a subsequent publication, *Disputed Subjects*, Flax continues her project of definition. As before, she grounds her philosophical work in her clinical practice: "The task of therapy cannot be the discovery (or construction) of a solid, unitary, pristine, and undistorted self lying somewhere down deep inside," she comments.

> If this is our definition, patients are bound to be disappointed and feel inadequate and defeated. Subjectivity is not an illusion, but the subject *is* a shifting and always changing intersection of complex, contradictory, and unfinished processes. (107-8)

How is one to theorize adequately such an apparently inchoate subject? Where is the "core," the source of continuity, in such a shifting, unfinished entity?

Morny Joy suggests an answer. Along with Flax, Joy expresses a disillusionment with both Enlightenment and poststructuralist theorizations of subjectivity; as well, she shares with her colleague a belief in the importance of taking into account the factor of lived experience--particularly the lived experiences of women--in any sort of theorization of self. "Flax' work," she comments, "mirrors the growing unease that many feminists have with a unilateral modern rejection of subjectivity, and its concomitant wariness of notions of agency" (12). In the context of a study of the autobiographical writing of women who have experienced incest (including Elly Danica's *Don't: A Woman's Word*), Joy draws upon Flax's nascent definition of the "core self" in order to develop her own similar model of subjectivity. Taking Flax's feminist concerns, and building also upon the hermeneutic thought of Paul Ricoeur, Joy proposes something she calls "strategic identity." "Strategic identity" is something very similar to Ricoeur's "narrative identity," she explains; it is a concept of subjectivity which assumes that the subject finds its configuration, and its continuity, in narrative:

> This term alludes to the fact that to narrate one's life is always an interpretation, situated at the confluence of many influences. It thus makes provision for the fact that a life can be viewed as a composite of plots, not just as one major theme in the service of a master plot or ideal. At any one time then, I could be trying to grasp or make sense of a particular episode that has affected my life, in relation to other plots, rather than writing an all-embracing panorama that incorporates every facet of my existence. (4)

I would like now to pursue this question of narrative further and, along the lines that Morny Joy takes, look in some detail at Ricoeur's thoughts on subjectivity. Narrative would seem to promise a way out of the Enlightenment/poststructuralist impasse, and the narrative hermeneutics of Ricoeur–particularly some of his most recent work on subjectivity–offer a potentially fruitful source for articulating the manner in which subjective continuity can be achieved and sustained, even amid existential fragmentation and contradiction.

Ricoeur and *Ipse*-Identity

As discussed in Chapter 4, narrative approaches to identity suggest a different and increasingly important way of understanding subjectivity. Along with the poststructuralists, theorists of narrative identity accept that language is integral to what we call subjectivity; unlike their poststructuralist counterparts, however, they take the step of insisting that it is narrative in particular which, as Paul Kerby puts it, "is precisely the privileged medium for understanding human experience, an experience that is paradigmatically a temporal and hence historical reality" (4). As we have seen, Kerby develops "a model of the human subject that takes acts of *self-narration* not only as descriptive of the self, but, more importantly, as *fundamental to the emergence and reality of that subject*" (Kerby 4). By emphasizing the self as a narrative or, as Roy Schafer puts it, as "a telling" (35), this approach allows for the possibility of self-coherence and continuity without necessarily assuming some sort of pre-linguistic or transcendent essence--hallmarks of Enlightenment or strictly phenomenological thinking. At the same time, however, while they acknowledge the thoroughgoing nature of the self's embeddedness in language, narrative theorists do not take the poststructuralist step of thereby dismissing the experience of selfhood as merely linguistic self-deception. Instead, they insist that through the use of narrative--in the process of telling one's life story to another--a very real type of linguistically mediated self is nonetheless established. This self may not be an essence, isolatable at any given moment, but can acquire the outline of a story and, hence, acquire continuity in the temporal dimension. The self, then, is not so much an entity--a thing, a kernel, an essence to be sought out, dug up and searched for behind, beneath and beyond the layering of culture and biology--and neither is it an entirely illusory construct of language: it is a *process,* an interpretive narrative process. What is needed, then, is not a definition of the self as it stands at one particular moment (at a glance, as it were, in front of the poststructuralist mirror) but an analysis of the more temporal process of narrative self-construction: a hermeneutics of subjectivity.

The work of philosopher Paul Ricoeur, who has written extensively on questions of narrative and subjectivity, outlines what such a hermeneutics might look like. In his most recent book, *Oneself as Another,* Ricoeur builds upon his previous work on narrative identity and goes on to explore the intersubjective and ethical implications of this view of self. In this book, Ricoeur philosophically unpacks the definition of selfhood. Selfhood is not one thing, he suggests, but two; or, more precisely, selfhood is best understood as a spectrum between two poles: the poles of "*idem*-identity" and "*ipse*-identity."[4] The problem with traditional (and many current) theorizations of selfhood, Ricoeur argues, is that they have focused too exclusively on the pole of *idem*-identity, creating as a result an incomplete and static view of the the self. Ricoeur sets out to amend this imbalance by redirecting theoretical attention to the pole of *ipse*-identity, and by analysing the dialectic between the two.

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[4] "Ipse" is the Latin word for "oneself," while "idem" translates as "same."

Idem-identity, a term Ricoeur borrows from Latin, is the pole of selfhood which is characterized by sameness, a sameness which guarantees the self's permanence in time. *Idem*-identity expresses itself in the form of enduring character traits--markers of individuality which enable recognition of the self in spite of the changes brought about through the flux of time and experience. It is this pole of selfhood, Ricoeur argues, that Enlightenment thinkers mistakenly took as the entire self, and upon which they based their foundationalist and unitary theorizations of identity. Ricoeur adds, however, that it is not only Enlightenment thinkers and their intellectual descendents (ie. all those who theorize selfhood as some sort of unchanging essence or core) who have been held in thrall by *idem*-identity but even those who would set out to overthrow such a theorization of self. Postmodernist thinkers, Ricoeur argues, even in their dramatic dismantling of traditional notions of the self, have nevertheless also tended to be caught up exclusively with the notion of the self as *idem*. Taking Nietzsche as the father of postmodernism and one of the key "masters of suspicion,"[5] Ricoeur shows how such intellectual iconoclasm is parasitical on the very theory it deconstructs, and ultimately does not introduce anything new, or expand the framework of theoretical discussion beyond the scope of the *idem*: "...Nietzsche's anticogito [represents] not the inverse of the Cartesian cogito but the destruction of the very question to which the cogito was held to give an absolute answer" (*Oneself* 14).

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[5] Ricoeur first uses this term in his book *Freud and Philosophy*, where he analyses the doubting, negative hermeneutics of thinkers such as Nietzsche, Marx and Freud, who approach interpretation with a presumption of false consciousness: things are never what they seem; there are always hidden and subtle forces at work underneath and behind apparently benign surfaces.

Choosing to reject both the "exalted subject" of Descartes and the Enlightenment, as well as the "humiliated subject" of Nietzsche and his contemporaries (*Oneself* 16), Ricoeur advocates instead an alternate route: an analysis of the neglected pole of *ipse*-identity and an investigation of the dialectic between the two poles. The self which Ricoeur discovers there is not static, discernable only in spatial or synchronic terms, but is more temporally situated, unfolding diachronically as an ongoing process. Neither an "exalted" nor a "humiliated" subject, such a self *becomes itself* through the mediation of texts, particularly narrative texts.

Having first introduced the notion of *ipse*-identity in his essay, "Self as *Ipse,*" Ricoeur devotes a large portion of *Oneself as Another* to an exploration of the uncharted terrain of *ipse*-identity. If *idem*-identity lays claim to a permanence in time by means of changelessness, or self-sameness, *ipse*-identity achieves such continuity through an entirely different channel: that of self-constancy. Being constant to oneself is not the same as being changeless; in fact, it is what is left of the self when there appears to be no continuity of character--when one cannot be recognized, so to speak. To be self-constant is to be true to oneself; to believe in oneself. If resemblance is the *idem*'s means of providing linkage between the self at various stages in its life journey, attestation is what performs this function for *ipse*-identity. "Attestation presents itself first...as a kind of belief," comments Ricoeur,

> But it is not a doxic belief...implied in the grammar of 'I believe-that,' attestation belongs to the grammar of 'I believe-in.' It thus links up with the testimony, as the etymology reminds us, inasmuch as it is in the speech of the one giving testimony that one believes. (21)

He continues,

> ...attestation is fundamentally attestation *of* self. This trust will, in turn, be a trust in the power to say, in the power to do, in the power to recognize oneself as a character in a narrative, in the power, finally, to respond to accusation in the form of the accusative: 'It's me here.' (22)

Ricoeur illustrates the two poles of selfhood, and the relationship between them, by making an analogy with the dialectic of character in fictional texts (*Oneself* 148-49). Narrative identity (be it fictional or "real") can find itself at one pole or the other, but more generally is found somewhere in between. A literary example of *idem*-identity is in the fairy tale, where each character typically has a firm character structure which is identifiable and reidentifiable as the same. Often described as "static" characters, such figures undergo no development of personality and essentially remain unchanged from beginning to end. Ricoeur then cites the classic novel as a fictional genre in which identity is situated at some point between the two poles. In such novels, characters typically undergo transformation, but remain enough the same that the reader still is able to recognize them as themselves. Such characters are "dynamic": changing and evolving, yet maintaining a consistency and continuity of character. Further along the spectrum are literary characters who begin to lose even this degree of consistency and continuity. These near-*ipse* characters, notes Ricoeur, can be found in apprenticeship and stream-of-consciousness novels. Finally, as character moves towards the *ipse* end of the continuum, literary examples are harder to find: the very notion of character itself is put on the line. Ricoeur calls these few examples limit cases, because in them, the "character" of the story ceases to have a definite outline (i.e., it lacks one which exhibits a continued sameness, a consistency of traits, etc.). It is hard to imagine such a text, but Ricoeur does find one: Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities*. In this text, Ricoeur remarks, "the decomposition of the narrative form paralleling the loss of identity of the character breaks out of the confines of the narrative and draws the literary work into the sphere of the essay. Nor is it by chance," he adds,

> that so many contemporary autobiographies, that of Michel Leiris for example, deliberately move away from the narrative form and move into the literary genre with the least configuration--the essay...[T]hese unsettling cases of narrativity can be reinterpreted as exposing selfhood by taking away the support of sameness. (*Oneself* 149)

One is reminded in this context of Elly Danica's autobiography, with its fragmentary sentence structure, and its use of numbered divisions. Chosen as deliberately as Leiris' structure (and one could also add, in this context, Roland Barthes' poststructuralist, anti-narrative autobiography), Danica's fragments nevertheless differ in that they seem to be seeking, rather than purposely avoiding, narrative configuration.[6]

Unlike *idem*-identity, then, *ipse*-identity cannot be discerned through some sort of scientific or philosophical litmus test. The selfhood asserted in attestation–in the persistent belief in and affirmation of self even in the face of accusation or apparent self-annihilation (or, more concretely, in the act of promising)–is far less tangible. It exists in the realm of faith, and depends, as Ricoeur puts it, upon a "belief-in" the very possibility of selfhood. Unlike *idem*-identity, *ipse*-identity is grounded in expression–in the self's establishment of itself through a linguistic act of self-affirmation and commitment. Hence, illocution is at the heart of the self as *ipse*. "Keeping one's word," comments Ricoeur, "expresses a self-constancy that, far from implying temporal changelessness, meets the challenge of variation in beliefs and feelings. In spite of this variation, I *keep* my word" ("Ipse" 106).

Ipse-identity, then, is closely linked to the self as agent, as performer of acts–including speech acts. Drawing upon the speech-act theories of Austin and

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[6] Danica's search proves fruitful: in her discovery of the myth of Inanna, and through her identification with this goddess, Danica finds a narrative structure for her own experiences, and with it a new sense of identity.

Searle, Ricoeur goes on to show how the *ipse,* defined as it is through the speech act of attestation, is intimately linked to the presence of the other. *Ipse*-identity emerges through a process of self-articulation and self-constancy. But in being true to oneself, Ricoeur insists, one is also by definition being true to another. In accord with linguist Emile Benveniste's assertion that the utterance of "I" necessarily implies a "you"–that "I use *I* only when I am speaking to someone who will be a *you* in my address" (Benveniste 224)–Ricoeur affirms that "utterance...is a bipolar phenomenon connecting an 'I' and a 'you'" ("Ipse" 111). At the pole of *ipse*-identity, therefore, in which selfhood emerges through speech-acts, subjectivity becomes intersubjective: selfhood becomes a fundamentally dialogical process.[7] And further, with the specific speech-act of the promise–the attestation Ricoeur identifies as being intrinsic to *ipse*-identity–this dialogical self becomes also an ethical self. To say "I promise" is to say "I promise *to you.*" The linguistic addressee becomes one to whom the speaking self makes a commitment and towards whom it is responsible, even if that responsibility is only to be itself. Even in the absence of any sense of *idem*-identity, when the question "Who am I?" is raised, an affirmation of self and implicitly a commitment to the other is made. Writes Ricoeur,

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[7] It is here that Ricoeur's description of *ipse*-identity begins to echo Bruss' speech-act poetics of autobiography, and resound with what feminist theorists of the genre have pointed out about women's life writing.

> The question becomes: "Who am I, so inconstant, that *notwithstanding* you count on me?" The gap between the question which engulfs the narrative imagination and the answer of the subject who has been made responsible by the expectation of the other becomes the secret break at the heart of commitment. (168)

The *Ipse* in Autobiographies of Trauma and Healing

"The void. Who was I?" (Cardinal, *The Words,* 164). This question "Who am I?" is an important one--both in Ricoeur's philosophy of identity and in the autobiographies of trauma and healing I've been looking at. Ricoeur points out the paradox of this situation of an individual pondering his or her own nothingness. "To be sure," remarks Ricoeur, "this nothingness is not the nothing of which there is nothing to say....But who is *I* when the subject says that it is nothing? A self deprived of the help of sameness..." (166). He adds:

> it may well be that the most dramatic transformations of personal identity pass through the crucible of this nothingness of identity....So many conversion narratives attest to such nights of personal identity. In these moments of extreme destitution, the empty response to the question "Who am I?" refers not to nullity but to the nakedness of the question itself. (166-167)

It is in existential crises like this, Ricoeur suggests, that *ipse*-identity most strikingly asserts itself: bereft of the reassuring support of sameness, detached from external sources of self-recognition, the *ipse* emerges simply as a voice--a voice crying out in the wilderness of self-alienation; a voice which, through the very act of utterance, is able to maintain its tenuous grasp on identity itself.

These are the voices heard in autobiographies of trauma and healing: voices of destitution, voices of individuals who have passed through that crucible of nothingness, and who, in the very act of asking the stark question "Who am I?", are able, in the presence of the other, to transform it into the affirmation "I am." Through the production of an autobiographical text--in the process of invoking a listening other through that linguistic act of self-narration-- these writers are able to transform the fragments of their identity into some sort of cohesive whole.

And it is in such circumstances, Ricoeur maintains, that the other emerges most profoundly. It is at this extreme pole of *ipse*-identity in which the "irruption of the other, break[s] through the enclosure of the same" (168). Ricoeur's theory of the *ipse* provides us with a framework for understanding the dialectic between writer and reader which occurs in these autobiographies. Finding themselves situated at the *ipse*-end of Ricoeur's spectrum, without the supports of *idem* to tell them who they are, these writers depend upon the presence, and solicitude of the the reader (whom their very "speech-act" of writing implies and invokes) to bring them back, as it were, to themselves. The reader hailed is one who will respond but also, importantly, one who will be responsible. As Ricoeur points out, the attestation and intersubjectivity of the *ipse* brings it into the realm of ethics:

> Self-constancy is for each person that manner of conducting himself or herself so that others can *count on* that person. Because someone is counting on me, I am *accountable for* my actions before another. The term "responsibility" unites both meanings: "counting on" and being accountable for. (165)

The issue of response and responsibility, as I've shown above, is paramount in these autobiographies. Danica's autobiography, especially, invokes its reader to a position of responsible reading: it places ethical demands upon the reader, asking the reader to believe the testimony given, and to acknowledge and affirm the self emerging during the course of this testimony. Reader response is demanded. Marie Cardinal's book also hails its reader into responsive and supportive reading, providing both models and anti-models of reading, thereby clearly establishing what an appropriate and nurturing response looks like.

As well as *counting on* the other, these autobiographers exhibit a strong commitment to *being accountable for* and *to* the other–particularly towards the other who is themselves. As Ricoeur's title indicates, the other is always also an internal presence. "Otherness is not added on to selfhood from outside, as though to prevent its solipsistic drift," he explains, "but...it belongs instead to the tenor of meaning and to the ontological constitution of selfhood..." (317). In these autobiographies, promises to oneself are made and kept: these writers are true to their own word, and implicitly, in this very process, are true to–and effectively *become*–themselves. As a young girl, Elly Danica promises herself that one day she will write a book, and tell her story. Marie Cardinal makes a similar vow: "To make them understand and to help those who lived in the hell where I also lived, I promised myself that I would some day write an account of my analysis, and turn it into a novel..." (248). By making good on their earlier avowals, these women establish a link with their earlier selves. Having experienced no continuity of self–no *idem*-identity during the intervening years, such a link becomes a crucial life-line, a subjective thread upon which a narrative reconstruction of the intervening years can be mounted. The selfhood of these women derives, then, not from discovering some essence of sameness within themselves–digging down to the core of who they were all along–but from being faithful to themselves over time.

These autobiographies, therefore, highlight the *ipse* which forms a part of each identity. What makes them stand out from other autobiographies is the starkness with which this *ipse* emerges. Traumatized by abuse, madness, autism and incest, which rip away from them any sense of subjective stability and continuity, these women are thrown into crises of identity and led in despair to that terrifying question: "Who am I?" Poststructuralist approaches to subjectivity are valuable here because of the precision with which they are able to describe the splintered existence which ensues. "To write by fragments," states Roland

Barthes, for example, in his own postmodernist autobiography, "the fragments are then so many stones on the perimeter of a circle: I spread myself around: my whole little universe in crumbs; at the center, what?" (*Roland Barthes* 92-93). But whereas for Barthes and the poststructuralists the question is "what?" and the answer, a nullity (fragmentation is the final word), the autobiographers I've been looking at ask the question, "who?" and in asking it, find, through narrative, an answer. In the very act of enunciating that question in their autobiographies, however, and through the process of narrative attestation, they are able, through the other, to find their way into a balance and wholeness of self unknown to them before. "As credence without any guarantee," Ricoeur says of such a process,

> but also as a trust greater than any suspicion, the hermeneutics of the self can claim to hold itself at an equal distance from the cogito exalted by Descartes and from the cogito that Nietzsche proclaimed forfeit. (23)

Conclusion

Contemporary Spiritual Autobiographies

Earlier in this study I proposed that these autobiographies of trauma and healing be considered as "autobiographical manifestos": life texts which have an emancipatory function and which address sociopolitical issues through the personal voice. Marie Cardinal's personal story is a memoir of madness, for example, but it is also, in its description of events in Algeria, a critique of French colonialism and the ways in which colonization inscribes itself on the gendered body. Donna Williams' autobiographies trace her personal struggle towards psychological integration and self-understanding, but seek also to educate and sensitize the public to the condition of autism.[1] And Elly Danica's autobiography, while painfully rendering an individual story of sexual abuse, also, at the same time, powerfully draws attention to the means by which patriarchal structures become complicit in female subjection and suffering.[2]

Smith's model, therefore, successfully highlights the political impetus of these texts, and aptly characterizes their emancipatory thrust. Yet at the same time the momentum towards liberation and the tenor of hope in these autobiographies are not entirely explained by this politically oriented model. There is also in this set of texts of trauma and healing a spiritual dimension at work, one which Ricoeur's hermeneutic theory of *ipse*-identity begins to tap into, and without which a discussion of these autobiographies would be incomplete. I would like now, in these concluding pages, to examine briefly this more reflective aspect of these "manifestos," in an exploration of their connections to the tradition of the spiritual autobiography.

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[1] In *Nobody Nowhere* Williams includes an afterword in which she provides a more clinical explanation of autism and her own experience as an autistic; as well, she appends a glossary of typical autistic gestures and their meanings in order "to help those of 'the world' understand this language and reach similar trapped and frightened people on their own terms" (211).

[2] Since publication of *Don't*, Danica has been an active spokesperson and advocate for the abused, making presentations at conferences and workshops dealing with issues of sexual abuse.

Spiritual autobiography most overtly distinguishes itself from other forms of life-writing by the prominence of its narrative of conversion: a life is interrupted--transformed--in an epiphanic moment which heralds a shift from darkness into light, from death to rebirth and a new relationship with the world. Some have argued that, indeed, all autobiography functions at some level as conversion narrative--that the very autobiographical impulse itself is triggered by some sort of life transition, which brings with it the desire for introspection.[3] In its earliest form, however, the conversion narratives of spiritual autobiography carried with them overtly religious overtones. In his introduction to John Bunyan's sixteenth-century classic of the genre, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners,* Roger Sharrock describes the typical pattern of the early Puritan spiritual autobiography. First, the

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[3] Geoffrey Galt Harpham, for example, argues that "the autobiographical text is a kind of machine for conversion. One is 'converted' when one discovers that one's life can be made to conform to certain culturally validated narrative forms; spiritual 'conversion' might simply be a strong form of reading" (44).

autobiographer typically recounts examples of early providential mercies: opportunities for grace that are missed or not responded to. This is followed by an account of the unregenerate life: a litany of sin and spiritual stumbling marked by resistance to the saving gospel. This segment finds its conclusion in a description of the conversion experience, a precise moment of revelation, typically ushered in by an "awakening" sermon. Finally, the autobiographer records the aftermath of conversion: the call to a new life of service and gratitude, usually involving preaching and pastoral work (xxix).

For early spiritual autobiographers, the writing of the conversion text–this narrative of spiritual malaise, conversion, and regeneration–itself functioned as an important part of the stage of calling and service. Life-writing became a form of preaching and pastoral work, a performative act which sought to affirm the community of believers, and exhort others to the gospel. In her analysis of eighteenth-century women's spiritual autobiography, Carol Edkins notes that "instead of individualistic statements of a life uniquely lived...we hear echoed throughout these documents, whether Puritan or Quaker, the religious and spiritual experience of the community at large" (40). Just as "autobiographical manifestos" seek to mobilize a community and further a cause through the personal voice, traditional spiritual autobiographies sought to affirm the faith community by interpreting and narrating individual religious experience in terms of the collective experience: personal spiritual texts were written to reflect the narrative tropes of the central spiritual text: the Bible. Linda Peterson especially highlights this intertextual, hermeneutic dimension of early spiritual autobiography. In her essay, "Gender and Autobiographical Form: The Case of the Spiritual Autobiography," she notes the preponderance of biblical typology in such autobiographies. "In the Preface to *Grace Abounding,*" she points out as an example, "Bunyan uses Moses and other biblical types [to] justify the publication of his account, treating the wanderings of the Israelites as prefigurative of his own experiences and Moses's act of recording their wanderings as prefigurative also" (213). In configuring and recounting their own lives according to established biblical narratives, these autobiographers signalled their membership in the spiritual community, and entered into a spiritual life heavily mediated by texts and characterized by hermeneutic self-interpretation.

Along with Peterson, Françoise Lionnet especially focuses on the textual and intertextual mediation characteristic of spiritual autobiography. In an essay on one of the earliest examples of the genre, Augustine's *Confessions,* Lionnet describes what she sees as "a twofold process of reading–writing as self-reading, and exegetic reading as redemption" (39). The structure of Augustine's book, she argues, with its narrative, meditative and philosophical sections, enacts the typical pattern of spiritual autobiography but also demonstrates the centrality of reading in the spiritual journey. "The death of the self as it lives in darkness is the main theme of the narrative books," she comments. "Conversion then leads to the cleansing and purification of book 10, in preparation for the act of reading and dialogue with God, as mediated through the text of Genesis" (50).

The moment of conversion, she notes, is itself highly textualized (Lionnet 60-62). Augustine's conversion is preceded by a conversation with his friends. Motivated by a book lying on the table, the epistles of Paul, Ponticianus proceeds to tell two narratives of conversion: the story of Antony, who upon reading the gospel gives away all he has and becomes a follower of Christ, and the story of an unnamed friend who, upon reading the story of Antony, also experiences conversion, "labouring under the pain of the new life that was taking birth in him" (Augustine 168). These stories in turn affect Augustine, who retreats to a garden and finds himself engaged in a spiritual struggle:

> I now found myself driven by the tumult in my breast to take refuge in this garden, where no one could interrupt that fierce struggle, in which I was my own contestant, until it came to its conclusion. What the conclusion was to be you knew, O Lord, but I did not. Meanwhile I was beside myself with madness that would bring me sanity. I was dying a death that would bring me life. (Augustine 171)

Hearing a child's voice calling "Take it and read, take it and read" (177), Augustine, recalling the story of Antony, returns to the house, picks up the Pauline epistles and reads. This act of reading brings with it for Augustine a dramatic end to his turmoil: "For in an instant, as I came to the end of the sentence, it was as though the light of confidence flooded into my heart and all the darkness of doubt was dispelled" (178).

This drama of reading and conversion, comments Lionnet, functions as a "*mise en abyme* of the effect of reading" (60), and signals Augustine's own text as yet another in the chain of mediating and transforming spiritual texts. In writing his spiritual autobiography, Augustine links himself with Paul, Antony and the unnamed friend and joins the community of believers. His text becomes, like theirs, a means of encouraging and edifying others on the path to conversion. "But when others read of those past sins of mine, or hear about them," he declares in the *Confessions*, "their hearts are stirred so that they no longer lie listless in despair, crying 'I cannot'" (208).

Spiritual autobiography, then, is characterized by its prominent narrative of conversion, its hermeneutic emphasis upon intertextuality as a means of self-interpretation, and its performative function in the creation and maintenance of spiritual communities. Autobiographies of trauma and healing also display these characteristics, and hence show a deep affinity with the genre of spiritual autobiography, both in form and function.

The autobiographical narratives I've been looking at are strongly marked by a conversion theme: in each case there is a transition from a life of despair and brokenness to one of healing and hope for the future.[4] These women, in their diverse circumstances, do indeed journey through a "dark night of the soul," the utter destitution of self which emerges in traditional spiritual autobiographies and which Ricoeur describes as characteristic of the *ipse* deprived of *idem* identity. After divesting herself of false narratives of self, for example, Cardinal describes a prolonged silence, a living death: "Everything I was, was destroyed, and in its place was zero, this beginning and end, this point from which everything vacillates between the more or the less, the zone of living death and of dead life" (165). Williams describes a dark night of utter desperation and isolation after a period of abuse when she symbolically begins to enact her own crucifixion: "The darkness in my soul, however, was the greatest, and I sat there starting vacantly into space, tearing my arm up with a nail I had found" (*Nobody* 88). And for Danica, after the horror and metaphorical death of the fifth gate–also a symbolic crucifixion, in which Danica links her fate to that of "[t]he Goddess Inanna on a meathook in hell" (13)–there is a despairing silence: "Life as a void. Life as a black hole in space" (70).

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[4] In her book, *From Sin to Salvation: Stories of Women's Conversions, 1800 to the Present,* Virginia Lieson Brereton makes a similar move, classifying a selection of twentieth-century

For each of these women, the silence and death-in-life find conclusion in a conversion-like moment of insight, a point at which the momentum of their journeys begins to change, returning from death and emptiness back into life–a new life. For Cardinal this transitional moment is marked by a dream: the dream of a horseman, which she'd had as a child, and which proves to be key in reconnecting her to the child she had been, enabling her experience of rebirth: "...there existed

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women's autobiographies (on feminist consciousness-raising, recovery from addiction, and lesbian coming out) as "out-of-church conversion narratives."

in me a hidden embryo which I could rediscover and, beginning there, I could expand and flower" (177). For Williams, the moment of insight takes place in the library. Reading through textbooks of psychiatry, she discovers the word that brings self-recognition and a visceral conversion experience, not unlike that of Augustine: "Suddenly it jumped out at me from the page...'Autism,' it read, 'not to be confused with schizophrenia.' My heart jumped, and I shook. Perhaps this was the answer or the beginning of finding one. I looked for a book on autism" (*Nobody* 187). Danica's experience of transition and her shift from despair into healing takes place long after the original abuse, when, at age forty, she begins to remember: "Forty. The Year of the Hare. The year of light in darkness. Rebirth. Memory as talisman. The dawn of hope. Somebody believes me" (13).

For each of these women, the process of "conversion" and healing is, as in spiritual autobiography, hermeneutic and textually mediated. Marie Cardinal describes her transformed relationship to language: "I had written books with words which were objects....I had not seen that they contained material which was alive" (241). In discovering the vitality of language, her dream and memory texts also become alive for her, triggering a process of textual/self-interpretation which in turn lead her to the liberation of narrative writing and "the words to say it." For Williams, textuality also stands as fundamental to her experience of conversion and healing. Finding the word "autism" and narrating and renarrating the story of her relationship to that word function to bring cohesion to the "bits and pieces" of her fragmented world. Through the mediation of her own text--both in the writing of it, but perhaps more so in her own reading of it–Williams, like Cardinal, discovers that language, and she herself, are alive.

Danica's text of trauma and healing provides a particularly interesting example of hermeneutic interpretation and textual mediation. Though of the three it is the most strident in its criticism of the institutional Christian church, it nevertheless most closely reflects the formal characteristics of traditional spiritual autobiography. If Bunyan and the other spiritual autobiographers of his time drew upon biblical narrative as a framework for their own, Danica adopts a different sacred text: the Sumerian myth of the goddess Inanna. Like those spiritual autobiographers, Danica hermeneutically uses this Ur-text as a means of interpreting her own experience, and structuring her narrative: Inanna's descent through the gates of hell, her death, and her resurrection aided by the help of Ninshubur provide for Danica a framework through which to transcribe and express the spiritual significance of her own experience of abuse and recovery. In addition, Danica presents her narrative in numbered fragments, thus making the physical text look as well as read like a scriptural or sacred text, complete with chapters and verses.

These autobiographical texts also resemble the performative spiritual and social function of the early spiritual autobiographies in the pragmatic way in which they serve to mobilize and maintain healing communities. Just as Elly Danica, for example, drew strength and encouragement from her reading of feminist writers ("Reading. A new world. Reading women writers: Millet, Greer, Morgan, Lessing, Atwood. Discovery. Beginning again. A journey to self begun at last" (87)), so her text has gone on to function as a catalyst for healing among other survivors of sexual abuse. Like the chain of inspirational texts in Augustine's story, Danica's text also positions itself in a line of women's writing, and has itself become a literary and therapeutic touchstone, particularly in Canada, for other survivors of sexual abuse. Through processes of writing and reader response, a community has formed itself around her text, promoting healing, and spawning further writing and publication.[5]

In several important ways, therefore, these autobiographies show an affinity with the tradition of spiritual autobiography. Not all critics, however, have endorsed spiritual autobiography as an apt model for women's life-writing. Mary Mason, for example, in her essay highlighting the dialogic nature of women's autobiography, comments that the

> ...dramatic structure of conversion that we find in Augustine's *Confessions*, where the self is presented as the stage for a battle of opposing forces and where a climactic victory for one force–spirit defeating flesh–completes the drama of the self, simply does not accord with the deepest realities of

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[5] "Immediately following publication of *Don't*," Janice Williamson notes, "Gynergy Press received one hundred unsolicited poetry and prose manuscripts of autobiographical incest narratives" ("I Peel" 137).

> women's experience and so is inappropriate as a model for women's life-writing. (210)

Sidonie Smith, in a discussion of Harriet Martineau's eighteenth-century autobiography, echoes Mason's reservations when she remarks that "while the biblical tradition offered a template for individual conversion and spiritual growth, it could not clear a space for the figure of an empowered female selfhood" (*Poetics* 133). Indeed, there are reasons to give pause and recognize the limitations of this genre as a framework for understanding these women's autobiographies of trauma and healing. As Mason points out, the battle metaphor and the implicit dualism between spirit and body (traditionally conflated with femininity) are problematic for women. If spiritual conversion involves, as Augustine would have it, a "putting away of the flesh" and a renunciation of the female body, then this does not leave much room, as Smith notes, for female empowerment.

The Christian spiritual tradition, specifically patriarchal elements of the Roman Catholic church, is certainly rejected in Danica's text. Highlighting the cruel irony in her situation of being told that "You are subject to your father in all things. He is your lord as jesus is your lord. He would do no harm or no wrong....If he is rough it is because he loves you" (15), Danica describes how, amid the abuse, she loses confidence in God the Father, and Jesus, and turns instead to female spiritual figures for solace and strength: "I have begged the virgin mary for help. I know that whatever they say in school about her son, he is deaf to the pleas of children" (16). Through the statue of the Virgin Mary given her by her grandmother in Holland, "mother mary" (66) becomes linked with Elly's Oma, "my grandmother in the moon" (16), who in turn becomes associated with the moon goddess, Inanna, who provides for Danica a restorative narrative; together, these female figures function to provide in Danica's text, as in her life, an alternative, more maternal, spiritual paradigm for healing and hope.[6]

It is this maternal emphasis which distinguishes these contemporary "spiritual autobiographies" of trauma and healing from their traditional, more patriarchal, and institutionally affiliated counterparts. Françoise Lionnet, in her discussion of Augustine's *Confessions*, is quite clear about the problems women face as they seek to write within a tradition which "constructs 'woman' as an internal other [of man], and a negative one," and in which "God figures as the internal but positive Other" (52), but nevertheless insists on the continued relevancy of texts such as Augustine's for female life-writers today. She comments,

> This is the legacy that contemporary women autobiographers will have to face before they can start writing and rewriting their selves, thus inventing new and empowering traditions for their (literary) daughters, traditions that

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[6] John Barbour, in his book *Versions of Deconversion: Autobiography and the Loss of Faith*, discusses this particular type of conversion. Sometimes the life-changing transition represents not only a shift towards a new belief system, but also the abandonment of an old one. He calls this "deconversion."

> will draw upon many of the metaphors of death and loss, reconciliation and plenitude, darkness and light present in the *Confessions.* (53)[7]

Women life-writers can borrow from patriarchal traditions, she implies, taking what is relevant to their experience, and rejecting or transforming what works against such expression. For Cardinal, Williams and Danica, it is the shift from a patriarchal spiritual context to a more maternal one which proves to be their most significant feminist revision to the autobiographical tradition within which they write.

This shift towards more feminine modes of experiencing and expressing spirituality is making itself felt within theological circles as well. Feminist theologians working within the Christian tradition are becoming increasingly disillusioned with and vocal about the patriarchal and sometimes paternalistic texts, creeds and practices of the church. "The Old and New Testaments have been shaped in their formation, their transmission, and, finally, their canonization to sacralize patriarchy," argues Mary Radford Reuther, a leading voice in this critique.

> They may preserve, between the lines, memories of women's experience. But in their present form and intention they are designed to erase women's existence as subjects and to mention women only as objects of male definition. In these texts the norm for women is absence and silence.

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[7] In fact, Lionnet sees Augustine's text, with its embracing of an integrating and relational view of the world, as an early prototype of the patterns of *metissage*, as she terms it, characteristic of much twentieth-century women's writing (36).

> Whether praised for their compliance or admonished for their "disobedience," women remain in these texts "the other." Their own point of view, their experience, their own being as human subjects is never at the center. (*Womanspeak* ix-x)

One of the central issues of contention for Ruether and other feminist theologians is the masculinist language traditionally used to name and describe God. Inherited notions of God as Father and King are exclusivist, even sexist, they argue; they fail adequately to reflect, or enable full expression of, the spiritual experiences of women. Reuther, in her book *Sexism and God-Talk: Towards a Feminist Theology,* and Mary Daly, in *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation,* trace the history of this patriarchal tradition, and discuss the constraints placed upon women's spiritual expression within it. Together, they advocate, and begin to map out, a broader, more inclusive, language for the divinity, and a theological paradigm which better accommodates and accounts for a diversity of spiritual expressions--including those involving experiences of a maternal God.[8]

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[8] It is significant to note that while Ruether maintains a confidence that such an alternative theological paradigm can be found within the Christian tradition, and hence continues her work within that context, Daly is not so sure, and has, since publication of *Beyond God the Father,* abandoned Christianity as a theological framework. "Should we reject all roots in the past and create something *de novo?"* asks Ruether. "Even if we pretended to do that, we could not," she concludes. "We can read between the lines of patriarchal texts and find fragments of our own experience that were not completely erased," she goes on to argue, in a similar vein to Lionnet with respect to women's life-writing. "We can also find, outside of canonized texts, remains of alternative communities that reflect either the greater awe and fear of female power denied in later patriarchy or questionings of male domination in groups where women did enter into critical dialogue" (*Womanguides* x-xi). Daly, on the other hand, is less optimistic, arguing that "attempts by women theologians now merely to 'up-date' or to reform theology within acceptable patterns of question-

Intimations of such a maternal divine figure can be found in the autobiographies of Cardinal, Williams and Danica. Spiritual autobiographies typically have a dual audience. If one of the audiences is the community--fellow believers as well as those on their way to joining that group--the second audience is a transcendent one. Such autobiographies are marked by the presence of what Lionnet terms the "spiritual addressee," or, more simply, God (44). As Augustine's text aptly demonstrates, the traditional spiritual autobiography functions doubly as a narrative "call" to human readers, but also as a more reflective prayer to the transcendent Other: public testimony and spiritual confession are closely bound up together in the same text. An analogy can be drawn here with the contemporary autobiographies I've been examining. With their double function as public "manifesto" and personal therapy, these autobiographies of trauma and healing also imply a dual readership. In these autobiographies, the nurturing, responsive and therapeutic type of reading needed and called for in and by the narratives, while hailing real readers who might well respond in kind, also exceeds what any real reader would ever be able to provide. An "ideal reader" is implied by these texts, one which very much resembles the transcendent and divine "spiritual

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asking are not likely to get far" (22). Some feminist thinkers have followed Daly's lead, rejecting Christianity altogether, and looking instead to pre-Christian goddess religions for spiritual inspiration. Elly Danica's adoption of the Sumerian Inanna story moves in this direction. See Carol Christ's *Laughter of Aphrodite*, Judith Ochshorn's *The Female Experience and the Nature of the Divine* for discussions of this alternative approach.

addressee" of the traditional spiritual autobiography.[9] But this ideal reader is not, as Danica's text insistently demonstrates, the father-God of Augustine and the traditional Christian church; instead, it is its female, maternal counterpart.[10] In each case, threaded through the narrative of trauma and healing, and woven into the sociopolitical fabric of the text, there is a quiet yearning for, belief in and appeal to an idealized maternal Other--an implied ideal reader whose believed in presence helps foster hope and healing.

Mothers figure prominently in Cardinal's autobiography. Her experience of madness and recovery is intimately tied up with her evolving relationship to her mother. If it is her mother's veiled hostility and mutilating words which play a large part in triggering her madness, it is Cardinal's subsequent resolution of her daughterly ambivalence which ushers in healing. Phil Powrie discusses this ambivalence, and the manner in which, in the narrative, "the mother is split into the good, caring mother on the one hand, and persecuting mother on the other." This split, he explains,

> is at its most evident in the chapter which deals with the narrator's recognition of the mother's madness, as for example when the 'bad' mother

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[9] In his essay, "Introduction to the Study of the Narratee," Gerald Prince defines the "ideal reader" as being, for the writer, "one who would understand perfectly and would approve entirely the least of his words, the most subtle of his intentions" (9).

[10] There seems to be a strong correspondence between the ideal and transcendent Other inscribed in these texts, and the figure of the "spirit guide" in feminist psychotherapy: both function as a reassuring addressee and guide--source of hope and wisdom. And in both cases, learning to recognize elements of that spiritual Other within the self comes to play an important part of the healing process.

> forces her daughter to eat the soup she has vomited, an event immediately followed by the evocation of the 'good' mother as carer when the narrator is ill. ("Reading" 169)

Vacillating between adoration of the good mother (and desire to be the perfect daughter) and simultaneous hatred of the bad mother (and repression of those feelings)--a conflict which expresses itself in madness and profound self-estrangement--Cardinal finds healing and the capacity for self-nurture when she is able to integrate the polarities into a more holistic image of her real mother, and make peace with that mother at the graveside.[11] This process of integration takes place; however, traces of the "good mother, and a desire for communion with an ideal maternal figure continue to linger in Cardinal's book. Not the paternalistic and moralizing "good mother" of the church, this maternal figure is linked instead with the plenitude, abundance and sensual vitality of the Algerian countryside, a place where Cardinal, as a child, feels both entirely free and entirely embraced and connected: "For Algeria was my real mother" (88).[12] This yearned for landscape comes to represent, in the narrative, an image of perfect motherhood--the kind of motherhood not provided by her own, real mother. Partially embodied in the nurturing figures of the doctor, the husband, and Cardinal herself, as well as in the implied readers of her text, this ideal mother is nevertheless not entirely revealed or embodied in any of these; she remains, to the very end of the narrative, a not-fully-realized transcendent ideal. Yet it is her capacity to remember Algeria, and imagine and believe in the possibility of such a nurturing presence--someone who would fully know, understand, accept and respond to the self emerging in the text--as well as her success in discovering elements of that Other within herself, that enables the narrator to persist, and find eventual healing.

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[11] In his discussion, Powrie draws upon Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic theory of the pre-oedipal splitting of the mother into good and bad, represented in the child's symbolization and responses to the good and bad breast.

[12] The book's most lyrical passages emerge when Cardinal describes her childhood ecstasy among the flowers and foliage of Algeria: "I wanted to dance in the middle of it with little bells on my feet and hands so that the whole world might hear my satisfaction" (*Words* 83).

Donna Williams' narratives also imply the presence of a transcendent and ideal maternal Other. In her autobiography, Williams, like Cardinal, describes a process of coming to terms with an abusive mother. Reaching a point where she is able to recognize the harm inflicted upon her by her mother's violence and neglect, but also recognizing the pathos and victimization at work in her mother's own situation, Williams is able to distance herself from that mother, and extricate herself from her emotional tyranny. Nevertheless, as with Cardinal, a persistent yearning for a mother emerges throughout the pages of her text. "I sat alone in the flat, deserted and terrified," she writes at one point. "I needed a mother desperately, but could not remember ever having one;...I felt homesick for the home I'd never had..." (*Nobody* 98). Williams attempts to salve this sense of orphaned lostness through the character of "Carol," who repeatedly re-enacts an early drama of being found in her compulsiveness about taking in stray kittens: "Whenever I became Carol, my true self had always been symbolized by a kitten.

This was my sense of self when the real Carol had taken me home to her house like some stray kitten she had found in the park" (*Nobody* 178-179). What Donna really desires, however, is a sense of being found–of being at home–not only within herself, but in the "the world" of others as well. Through her writing, she begins to discover that sense of belonging. In various relationships she begins to feel that sense of connection and maternal envelopment. But like Cardinal, while belief in the possibility of such relational immediacy is something which drives the narrative, and propels the process of healing, it is something not-fully-realized within the text, or in her life. Though Williams comes to acquire a sense of nurturance and belonging in "the world," the yearning for that "long-awaited mythical mother" is never entirely erased, and that ideal sense of being at home, though imagined, never fully realized. (*Nobody* 121).

As discussed above, Elly Danica's autobiography demonstrates a strong sense of a transcendent maternal Other. In her case, this "spiritual addressee" emerges as a composite of her Oma, Mary the mother of Jesus, Inanna the moon goddess, and aspects of her own mother. Danica finds healing, but there lingers in her text, as in Cardinal's and Williams', a not-quite-complete sense of closure: Elly's mother never does "meet her eyes" (9). "There is nothing between us, there never was," she writes. "Except for my yearning, my four-year-old yearning for my mother" (71). Amid all the pain inflicted on her by her abusive father, probably the most poignant, if more understated, pain experienced by Danica is that emerging from her broken relationship with her mother. It is a pain that transforms itself into an ongoing quest for maternal nurturing and affirmation: "I search for a mother" she writes, "....I have been an orphan most of my life" (71). Transforming her childhood yearning into a dream of possibility, Danica writes that presence into her text as a transcendent Other, an ideal reader who, unlike her own mother, and even more so than any real reader could hope to do, would meet her eyes and listen and understand.[13]

These autobiographies of trauma and healing, thus, while concretely involved in a sociopolitical practice of community-building, also give voice to a dimension of self which can best be described as spiritual. As Ricoeur suggests in his description of the attesting *ipse,* it is a part of the self which is able, through the very act of utterance, to persevere even in the face of utter fragmentation and loss of self, to believe in the possibility of being heard even in situations of extreme isolation, and to go on to declare, "I am." "Why did I persist in going to the cul-de-sac?" asks Cardinal of herself at one point, when her analysis seemed to be going nowhere, and when she was losing hope (166). Elly Danica, in her narrative, suggests an answer: "faith in the process" (14).

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[13] It's significant in this context to note that Danica chooses to live a womb-like church building during her time of remembering: "I find an old church. Sanctuary. A church like the one I ran to as a child. A safe place....In the old church it [poverty] comes with cold. Eventually fibreglass gives me pink walls. A womb structure" (89).

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